

ACTING AND ITS REFUSAL IN THEATRE AND FILM

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Abstract

This thesis examines works of theatre and film that explore a refusal of acting. Acting has traditionally been considered as something false or as pretending, in opposition to everyday life, which has been considered as something real and truthful. This has resulted in a desire to refuse acting, evident in the tradition of the anti-theatrical prejudice where acting is considered to be seductive and dangerous. All the works that I examine in this thesis are relatively recent and all of them explore the paradox that in our (postmodern) times a gradual reversal has occurred where everyday life is seen as more and more false or as pretending or simulating (ie. containing acting and theatricality) and conversely, acting in theatre and film has become the place where people have begun searching for reality and truth and where ‘acting’ and pretending in life can be revealed and refused. The result of this paradox - and what I also discuss as a confusion of acting and living - is that the place in which acting can be refused has shifted; the ethical desire to refuse acting (in theatre and in life) is turning up in the aesthetic domain of acting itself.

In my first chapter I study works by filmmaker István Szabó and playwright Werner Fritsch, who represent the desire to refuse acting in the context of fascism where theatrical and filmic spectacle was used by the Nazis to seduce the population and where actors during this period also experienced an inability to separate their political and artistic lives. In my second chapter I look at the way Genet’s *The Balcony* and Ang Lee’s *Lust, Caution* explore the desire to refuse acting as a result of a confusion of acting and living in the context of sexual (sadoomasochistic) role-play. And in my third chapter I examine the way Warhol’s *The Chelsea Girls*, von Trier’s *The Idiots* and Affleck’s *I’m Still Here* represent a refusal of acting and theatricality altogether, responding to the way that ‘acting’ in life may have become an all-pervasive substitute (a simulation) for living. Foundational to the development of this thesis and a major source of material is my analysis of three theatrical productions with Free Theatre Christchurch, directed by Peter Falkenberg, in which I was involved as an actor and in which a refusal of acting was explored.

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Introduction

Acting, in the English language has two different meanings. It means either doing an action, or pretending to do an action. Acting (pretending) is considered to take place in the theatre or on film, in places marked clearly as performance space, while acting (doing) is considered to take place in everyday life. Throughout the history of our culture there have existed circumstances where these two types of ‘acting’ have become confused – where real life has been revealed as something acted and pretended or where performance is seen to contain elements of real life action.¹ That everyday life is seen in a metaphorical or *theatrum mundi* sense as theatre has become a well-known cliché articulated most famously by Shakespeare: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.”² Likewise, performance is often commended for the ‘lifelike’ illusion it creates. There are numerous works that explore such confusions of acting and living. However, it is the desire to refuse acting (in theatre and in life) that results from this confusion that is at the centre of the works of theatre and film I examine in this thesis.³

My desire to write this thesis has emerged out of my experience as an actor. In my everyday life I have experienced the expectation to behave in certain ways. I felt that these expected behaviours either did not express who I really was or wanted to be or I have felt incompetent or fraudulent when attempting them. Unlike in life, where ‘acting’ roles are naturalised and unconscious, in the theatre, where acting and pretending is acknowledged, I have experienced the liberating possibility of having the license to experiment with and embody behaviours without feeling dishonest. In other words, in life I often feel like an actor and that I am not really living, whereas in the theatre I can be truthful and feel really alive. Antonin Artaud’s writing about the theatre best describes my own feelings about it, for example, when he writes: “In life I don’t feel myself living. But on the stage I feel that I exist” (Artaud qtd. in Schumacher xxiv). Perhaps as a direct result of this, I have been acutely aware of the distrust, resentment, and pure hatred of acting in the theatre that those close to me have often expressed. Their desire to refuse my acting in the theatre resulted in my own equally strong desire to refuse the ‘acting’ they expected of me in life.

¹ This is pointed out by Victor Turner at the beginning of his chapter “Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting” in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982).

² *As You Like It* [II.7. 140-1].

³ When I use the term ‘acting’ in quotation marks in this thesis, I refer to acting (pretending) when it occurs in everyday life, outside the conventional spaces for performance and where it enters the realm of acting (doing).

As an actor with Free Theatre Christchurch under the artistic direction of Peter Falkenberg, I have been able to examine both my own and other people's desires to refuse acting. In the film *Remake* (2009), directed by Falkenberg, a confusion of acting and living was deliberately explored as an attempt to understand the Parker/Hulme murder case where two teenage girls murdered one of their mothers. The murder that took place in this film can be understood as a refusal of the 'acting' in life expected of these girls by society. Exploring my own 'acting' life in the film provided an opportunity for me to refuse this 'acting' as well. *Remake* also provided material for my MA thesis in which I concluded:

Remake began for me as curiosity and narcissism but my desire to 'commit' to the film ultimately was as an act of refusal. A refusal to allow anyone to project their own desires onto my life and expect me to reflect them back. A refusal to be handed desires and fantasies that are not my own. A refusal to be cast in a role and directed towards a life that I don't desire and an identity that is not mine. (McCurdy 256)

Free Theatre has continued this exploration of the confusion between acting and living in subsequent productions in particular in *Faust Chroma* (2008), *Enigma Emmy Göring* (2008) and *Distraction Camp* (2009). My involvement in these productions as an actor provided practical experiential research for my theoretical exploration into this problematic of acting and my specific interest in its refusal, which along with the other works I examine in this thesis, was represented in these productions in different ways.⁴

The refusal of acting has a long and significant history. A prejudice against acting in the theatre has existed in non-western cultures such as India and China and in European culture first documented in the pre-Christian era of the Ancient Greeks. In his book *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* Jonas Barish provides the history of the anti-theatrical tradition beginning with Plato who wrote in the *Republic* of his distrust of mimesis in all art forms: "[I]mitative art is somewhere far removed from what's true" (298). Of the theatre in particular, in *The Laws*, Plato describes the composers of dithyrambs as "Gripped by a frenzied and excessive lust for pleasure", and he condemns these theatrical spectacles for making Athenian citizens unrightfully opinionated, "unwilling to submit to the authorities. . . and the very end of the road comes when they cease to care about oaths and promises and religion in general" (153; 154). In Plato's view acting in the theatre was something that

⁴ As with the other works I analyse in this thesis I only concentrate on the aspects of these productions that support my analysis. As a result it is often the roles and performances of actors other than myself which prove useful to this task.

seduced the general populace away from truth as it was ordained by religion and higher authority.

The birth of Christianity is distinctive for the way the devil entered the debate and is linked to actors, because they disguise themselves and pretend to be what they are not. Actors are considered “evil because they try to substitute a self of their own contriving for the one given them by God” (Barish 93). This attitude is illustrated in one of the most famous stories from the Bible where the devil lies to Eve by disguising himself as a snake. But what makes this ‘acting’, this lying, dangerous and something that needs to be refused is the other lie in the story when the devil tempts Eve with an apple from the tree of knowledge, telling her not only will she not die if she eats it but that she will become like God. In other words, the devil lies (acts) in order to seduce. Seduction here means both a seduction away from and in direct rivalry with God and a seduction towards the sexual power that seduces Adam. This belief shows clear connections to Plato’s reservations about the theatre for the pleasure it gave and the way this “excessive lust” weakened the power of the religious authorities over Athenian citizens. As Jean Baudrillard writes in his introduction to *Seduction (De la séduction, 1979)*: “For religion seduction was a strategy of the devil, whether in the guise of witchcraft or love” (1).⁵ Acting in the theatre was equated with the devil because the lying (acting) that took place in it was seductive.

In early Christianity, Barish describes the way acting was considered a “deeply disturbing temptation” which could only be dealt with “by being disowned and converted into a passionate moral outrage” (115). This outrage and determination to refuse acting focused on seduction: “[T]he Christian life involves a sustained struggle against worldly contentments. The theater, which offers pleasure in such intensity and abundance, which for so many thousands of its addicts is virtually synonymous with pleasure, must incur damnation on that score alone” (52). Barish cites Tatian (c. 160 A.D.) who denounced theatre “mainly because, like sexual activity and the eating of meat, it gave pleasure” (44). Barish notes the way in the early third century Tertullian similarly denounced “its excitements and its maddened crowds, [which] deliberately aims to provoke frenzy. . . . Even if the theater specialized in tales of innocence it would be a seduction and a snare. But in fact it is disfigured by obscenities that defile actors and spectators alike” (45).

⁵ Plato also used the term “witchcraft” when describing in the *Republic* the susceptibility of human nature to be confused between appearance and reality: “[I]t’s by exploiting this susceptibility of our nature that perspective painting, and puppetry, and many other ingenious contrivances like that are nothing short of witchcraft” (303).

This attitude amongst Christians reflected the changed position of theatre from Greek to Roman times. As Johan Huizinga notes in his observations of the situation in Ancient Greece, acting there did not contain the idea of feigning or pretending, as what he calls the play-spirit (acting) was not distinct from life but integrated into it: “Hellenic society was so profoundly imbued with the play-spirit that this spirit never struck the Greeks as a special thing on its own” (144). Despite Plato’s disparaging of the act of imitation, theatre in Greece upheld the religious values of the state. In Rome, however, theatre had started its move into secularised entertainment and was associated with spectacles such as the gladiatorial games. This change meant that actors who in Greek times had been revered by the state, in Roman times came to be likened to criminals and slaves.

This association of the theatre with spectacles of real violence helps explain why Tertullian saw no difference between the pretending of an action on the stage and the real doing of that action. He believed that to perform a deed onstage was, as Barish suggests, “to approve it in the most primitive and literal sense: to perceive it as raw fact and to rejoice in it as fact” (45). Barish uses the example of the gladiatorial games to explain Tertullian’s view where, while the games were also presented as a spectacle of theatrical entertainment, they contained real, not pretended violence and should therefore not be considered theatre and Barish points out that Tertullian refused to make this distinction (48). However, perhaps Tertullian didn’t confuse these spectacles but considered that something real was taking place in the acting he witnessed in all theatre? This contradicts the idea of acting as lying; it is a problem he does not appear to articulate, and a problem that will turn up in my thesis repeatedly. Tertullian’s reported early passion for theatre and gladiatorial games in the light of his later hatred for acting can be seen, as Barish puts it, as a trading of “frenetic licentiousness for an exaggerated asceticism” (Barish 54).

In the 4th Century A.D. Saint Augustine took up Tertullian’s linking of acting with the devil, in his work *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), which is a loving homage to God and his newly discovered commitment to Christianity. His approach however, was to devote himself to attempts to understand his early attraction to sinful pursuits of pleasure during his youth in Carthage, “where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust” (Augustine 55). One of his vices was the theatre: “I was much attracted by the theatre, because the plays reflected my own unhappy plight and were tinder to my fire” (55). Familiar with Aristotle’s discussion of catharsis in the *Poetics*, Augustine describes the way the theatre functioned to generate pity in an audience: “[T]he more tears an actor caused me to shed by his performance on the stage, even though he was portraying the imaginary distress of others, the

more delightful and attractive I found it” (57). But unlike Aristotle who saw this function as positive and purging, Augustine denounced it for being based on lying and for no better purpose than entertainment: “[I]n those days I used to share the joy of stage lovers and their sinful pleasure in each other even though it was all done in make-believe for the sake of entertainment” (56). He believed that in earlier times, “the gods to whom the theater was to be dedicated were actually devils in disguise seeking to corrupt Roman citizens” (61).

Significantly, Augustine compares the theatre with the church: “Contrast. . . that holy spectacle with the pleasures and delights of the theatre. There your eyes are defiled, here your hearts are cleansed. Here the spectator deserves praise if he but imitate what he sees; there he is bad, and if he imitates what he sees he becomes infamous” (qtd. in Barish 57). By calling the church ritual a spectacle and therefore comparing it to the theatre, Augustine implies that the acting that takes place in the theatre shares similarities with the ritual action that takes place in a church. The pretended actions in the theatre and the symbolic actions in a religious ritual have a lot in common. Either, ritual action in the church can be seen as a series of pretended actions based on lies, or acting in the theatre can be seen to have the kind of ritual efficacy that takes place in religious worship as it did in Greek times. Both possibilities explain the vehemently negative reaction the theatre received from Christians who perceived it as a direct threat to Christian worship, where the actors could be seen to rival priests. Actors were therefore subsumed into Christian logic by being likened to the devil - as liars and pretenders - in an attempt to neuter the power the theatre had to seduce its audiences away from God’s teachings, which included the containment of lust and the regulation of pleasure into approved forms. Barish describes Augustine’s attitude to the theatre in this way: “[T]he theater has played the role of a false temple, or anti-temple, standing in mocking antithesis to the true temple, masquerading indeed as the true temple, with its own antipriests and antirituals, inhabited by demons, devoted to the Devil, and dedicated to the overthrow of humanity” (63-4).

Centuries later the association of actors with the devil remained unchanged and emerges especially amongst the Puritans for whom: “The theater stood for pleasure, for idleness, for the rejection of hard work and thrift as the roads to salvation” (114). In the 17th Century, William Prynne in his publication of *Histriomastix* (1633), like Augustine, also describes the theatre in direct competition with the church: “*For what a desperate wicked thing is it, for a man to goe out of the Church of God, into the Chappell of the Devill*” (523).⁶

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, in this thesis all italics used in quotations are also in the original.

Over two large volumes Prynne vents his outrage concerning acting which “*perverts the workes of God*” as it “*transformes the Actors into what they are not; so it insuseth falsehood into every part of soule and body, as all hypocrisie doth*; in causing them to seeme that in outward appearance which they are not in truth” (159-60). He notes the way acting transforms men “*into the very portraiture of those Divell-Idols, whose parts they are to act: and so turne the expresse Image of God himself into the very image of the Devill*” (89). Barish observes: “There is something shameless and compulsive about Prynne’s tirades. It is as though he were himself goaded by a devil” (87):

He expresses, one might say in most agonized form, the fears of impurity, of contamination, of ‘mixture,’ of the blurring of strict boundaries, which haunted thousands in the Renaissance as they had haunted Plato and Tertullian. Prynne is terrified, maddened, by the fear of total breakdown. In the uncontrolled outpouring of his style he conjures up a nightmarish vision of a world itself out of control, a horrendous dystopia ruled by the Prince of Darkness, who has made of the theater his chosen weapon for the overthrow of man and the final establishment of his own empire. (87-88)

Arthur Bedford followed suit in *Evil and Danger of Stage-Plays* (1706) where he described actors as: “*Persons bold in Sin, and openly addicted to the Service of the Devil*” (qtd. in Barish 233). Bedford determined “to prove the *Stage* to be a *Sink of Sin*, a *Cage of Uncleaness*, and the Original Cause of all our Profaneness” (qtd. in Barish 232).

These refusals of acting by Christians, as in Roman times, weren’t necessarily adopted by the state. For example, after the publication of his book, Prynne was fined, imprisoned and tortured for “an offensive remark against actresses thought to be a slur on the queen, who loved to play in court theatricals” (Barish 88). The Middle Ages had also been significant for the way the Church utilised acting to illustrate the teachings of God using mystery and morality plays. However, as Barish notes, a delicate relationship to acting remained: “[T]he theater in sixteenth-century England was merely one weapon in a game of power politics, which suited the Puritans so long as they could wield it themselves, but against which they turned savagely when it was wrested from their grip” (Barish 116).

Regardless of whether the acting was taking place in a church or in the theatre, the devil who seduces and manipulates the truth by disguise, acting and pretending has been one of the most popular characters. Mephisto from the Faust legend, one of the archetypal stories and myths in German culture, became the most famous representation of the devil in Christian culture. Christopher Marlowe produced the first known dramatisation of the legend with *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, reportedly first performed in 1592 (Marlowe Lviii). The attraction for audiences of the devil character,

Mephostophilis, was in his abilities as an actor and seducer as he morphs into and appears in various guises. Mephostophilis also appears dressed like a woman, which illustrates the devil's other power of seduction via the promise of sexual pleasure. These transformations can be traced back to the Bible story when the devil transforms himself into a snake to appear before Eve. But unlike in the Bible story where Eve is unaware she is being lied to, in Marlowe's rendition of the Faust myth, Faustus is aware of the devil as an actor and liar.

In Marlowe's play, the devil Mephostophilis is master of the art of disguise and also of conjuring. This conjuring is even rumoured to have had real life consequences during the reign of Queen Elizabeth when the devil himself was said to have appeared on the stage during a performance of Marlowe's play at Belsavage Playhouse in response to the conjuring of the actor playing Mephostophilis, making himself "indistinguishable from those other actors who were merely pretending to be devils" (Barish 116). This rumour is a confirmation that Tertullian's suspicion that actors were not simply pretending actions on the stage (to conjure the devil for example) but doing real actions, remained. Prynne describes this particular occurrence:

The visible apparition of the Devill. . . (to the great amazement both of the actors and spectators) while they were there prophanelly playing the History of Faustus (the truth of which I have heard from many now alive, who well remember it) there being some distracted with that feareful sight. (qtd. in Chambers 423-24)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe also used acting in the theatre to explore and demonstrate the devil's seductive and theatrical qualities in his theatrical rendition of the Faust myth in 1808. Both Marlowe's and Goethe's theatrical versions of the Faust myth exist in the tradition of the anti-theatricalists where the devil's acting seduces Faust(us) away from God.

One of the most articulate writers to refuse acting in the modern age (although from a determinedly anti-Christian perspective) was Friedrich Nietzsche. Echoing Plato he writes in *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882) of his disdain for acting because of its falseness and pretence but especially for the way in which he perceived people around him becoming like actors in their everyday lives. He notes the way that when people act and pretend certain beliefs and behaviours in life - these eventually *become* their beliefs and behaviours. While in his early writing Nietzsche insists on a reality where acting (in theatre and in life) is refused, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887) he considers that 'acting' may have become reality. Nietzsche's writing on the refusal of acting both in theatre and in life is central to my argument throughout this thesis.

Nietzsche's observation of the pervasiveness of 'acting' in everyday life has over the past century been a fascination to writers who have analysed it as a phenomenon of modern living. Rainer Maria Rilke in his novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, 1910) mused:

We discover that we do not know our role. We look for a mirror; we want to remove our make-up and take off what is false and be real. But somewhere a piece of disguise that we forget still sticks to us. A trace of exaggeration remains in our eyebrows; we do not notice that the corners of our mouth are bent. And so we walk around, a mockery and a mere half: neither having achieved being nor actors. (Shapira)

The sociologist Erving Goffman, explores this phenomenon explicitly in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where he reformulates Shakespeare's famous saying to examine the confusion of acting and living: "All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify" (72). Goffman recognised that acting and real life have fundamental things in common:

A character staged in a theatre is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the *successful* staging of either of these types of false figures involves use of *real* techniques – the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real life social situations. (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* 254-5)

Like the later writing of Nietzsche, Goffman doesn't assume that a more authentic reality lies behind this acting in life, criticising the distinction, especially in Anglo-American culture, between "the real, sincere or honest performance; and the false one" (70). Goffman rejects the notion of an autonomous self: "[S]elf – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented" (252-3). Using a quote by Robert Ezra Park, Goffman states that, "the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self" (Park qtd. in Goffman 19).

In the forward to his 1958 2nd edition of *Critique of Everyday Life* (*Critique de la vie quotidienne I: Introduction*, 1947), Henri Lefebvre also discusses this conflation of acting and living:

Familiarity, what is familiar, conceals human beings and makes them difficult to know by giving them a mask we can recognize, a mask that is merely the lack of something. And yet familiarity (mine with other people, other people's with me) is by no means an illusion. It is real, and is part of reality. Masks cling to our faces, to our skin; flesh and blood have become masks. The people

we are familiar with (and we ourselves) *are* what we recognize them to be. They play the roles I have cast them in and which they have cast for themselves. And I myself play a role for them and in them (and not only while they are watching), the role of friend, husband, lover, father which they have cast me in and which I have cast for myself. If there were no roles to play, and thus no familiarity, how could the cultural element or ethical element which should modify and humanize our emotions and our passions be introduced into life? The one invokes the other. A role is not a role. It is social life, an inherent part of it. What is faked in one sense is what is the essential, the most precious, the human, in another. And what is most derisory is what is most necessary. It is often difficult to distinguish between what is faked and what is natural, not to say naïve (and we should distinguish between a natural naïvety and the naturalness which is a product of high culture). (15)

Lefebvre's observations suggest that we live in a reality where we play roles that determine our interactions and experiences. It is not that he abdicates the possibility of some kind of truthful consciousness, but that he recognises that it is no longer possible to tell apart what is "faked" and what is not.

Baudrillard is the most well known philosopher of recent times who has engaged with the possibility that acting has become our reality in a form of 'simulation'. Baudrillard was influenced by Situationists such as Guy Debord who resolutely refused the spectacle of modern capitalism that he saw as substituting for reality. Along with Nietzsche, Baudrillard is the other philosopher whose theories have a central influence on my discussion of recent theatrical and filmic works in this thesis. I use Baudrillard to apply Nietzsche's predicament to our own time to examine the way we may also be in one of the most interesting 'stages' of history, where a separation of acting and living is no longer possible.

In the anti-theatrical Christian tradition suspicion of acting in the theatre has run parallel to the suspicion of women. Originating in the story of Eve, women have been associated with the devil and with acting and seduction. In response to this, men have desired power over women just as they have sought to tame the devil that both repels and attracts them. This association is represented in a passage from the 1587 Faust chapbook where the devil transforms himself into a seductive woman: "[W]hen he did succeed in being alone to contemplate the Word of God, the Devil would dizen himself in the form of a beautiful woman, embrace him, debauching with him, so that he soon forgot the Divine Word and threw it to the wind" ("Historia & Tale of Doctor Johannes Faustus"). Barish finds in the writing of Tertullian "an early instance of a long-lasting motif: prejudice against the theater coupled with prejudice against women, especially beautiful, ornamental, and seductive women" (50):

[I]n his tracts on feminine dress and adornment, Tertullian attributes all cosmetics, all use of jewelry, all attempts of women to beautify themselves, to the promptings of the Evil One. Ladies who put cream, rouge, or antimony on their faces 'are not satisfied with the creative skill of God; in their own person... they censure and criticize the Maker of all things!... taking thee their additions, of course, from a rival artist. This rival artist is the Devil. (*Disciplinary Works* qtd. in Barish 49-50)

Women were banned from acting on the stage up until recent centuries and even the act of men dressing up as them upon the stage was considered a perversion (Barish 48-9). When it did begin occurring, a woman who acted in the theatre was considered a prostitute for virtue of the fact that she was paid to seduce an audience (282). Prynne, for example, describes actresses as "notorious impudent, prostituted Strumpets" (Prynne 214).

This perception of women as actresses both on and off the stage continued into the 19th Century, though not only for moral reasons. Schopenhauer wrote in "Of Women" ("Über die Weiber", 1851) that "it lies in woman's nature to look upon everything only as a means for conquering man; and if she takes an interest in anything else, it is simulated – a mere roundabout way of gaining her ends by coquetry, and feigning what she does not feel" (Schopenhauer). Nietzsche also describes women as actresses in *The Gay Science*: "Finally women. Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not *have* to be first of all and above all actresses? . . . That they 'put on something' even when they take off everything. Woman is so artistic" (*The Gay Science* 317). Nietzsche also referred to audiences in the theatre as female: "There one is common people, audience, herd, female, Pharisee, voting cattle, democrat, neighbor, fellow man. . . . [T]here stupidity has the effect of lasciviousness and contagion" (326).

Alongside the anti-theatrical prejudice there has been a movement during the last century within theatrical and filmic art forms themselves starting with Konstantin Stanislavsky's and then Lee Strasberg's 'realism' techniques, to refuse acting as pretending in favour of being or being present. The secondary literature about the range between acting and non-acting on the stage is extensive with some of it based on a re-examination of realistic Stanislavski-based acting. I will not go into these texts but they are listed in my bibliography and include but are not limited to: Michael Goldman's *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama* (1975) and *On Drama: Boundaries or Genre, Borders of Self* (2000); Charles Marowitz's *The Act of Being* (1978); Joseph R. Roach's *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (1985); John Harrop's *Acting* (1992); Richard Hornby's *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (1992); Alan Read's *Theatre and Everyday Life* (1993); Alice

Rayner's *To Act, To Do, To Perform* (1995); Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (2001); Martin Puchner's *Stage Fright* (2002); and Erika Fisher-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance (Ästhetik des Performativen)*, (2004). Others such as Eli Rozik, Rob Baum and Bert O. States look at acting as a metaphor for living, but as they apply acting to life in a metaphorical rather than actual way, they are also not the focus of my investigation.

One development that arose from the re-examination of Stanislavsky-based acting was postdramatic theatre, a term conceived by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his work *Postdramatic Theatre (Postdramatisches Theater)*, (1999). Lehmann describes the way "The actor of postdramatic theatre is often no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his/her presence on stage for contemplation" and he notes Michael Kirby's conception of the term "not-acting" to describe this phenomenon (135). As the term "not-acting" implies, what takes place here is a denial rather than a refusal, of acting, in favour of a sought after authentic presence. And so the problematic of acting is circumvented or avoided by another form of performance that could be seen in the anti-theatrical tradition. But I am not going to add another study of postdramatic acting in this thesis. Rather I am interested in theatrical and filmic works that directly engage with or thematise acting in order to refuse it, and where truth and authenticity may only become visible in the acting of the refusal itself. So I will only talk about happenings or performance art in as far as I see them constituting this kind of refusal. Also I will only discuss the ethics of the refusal of acting, when they concern the theme, form and aesthetic of the refusal of acting that constitute the works that are the subject of my inquiry. My interest in ethics is perhaps expressed in the paradox that Nicholas Ridout describes in *Theatre and Ethics* (2009):

[I]f ethics has anything to do with truth – and it is hard to imagine an ethics that has not – then the theatre might be a very strange place to come looking for it. It is, after all, the home of pretending. All the same, people do come to the theatre looking for truth. Perhaps it is the uncertainty about truth and untruth, which is foreground in the experience of theatre, that makes it an appealing place to come in search of ethical questions. (15-16)

On the other hand the theories and writings of Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty are important to my research for the way he used theatre to directly engage with and to refuse acting. Artaud embraced Nietzsche and the anti-theatricalists' abhorrence of acting and was inspired by some of Augustine's writings on the theatre where theatre is equated with the plague. However, Artaud uses Augustine's metaphor of the theatre as the plague in a positive sense as a scourge for falseness and pretending, writing that acting in the theatre is precisely

the place where it is possible to refuse “the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world” (31). Artaud refused to accept life in modern civilisation as reality, considering true life to be the double of the theatre, exemplified in his development of a Theatre of Cruelty: “[T]he theatre is act and perpetual emanation, that there is nothing congealed about it, that I turn it into a true act, hence living, hence magical” (114).⁷

Artaud’s aims for his Theatre of Cruelty to reject bourgeois Aristotelian theatre shares similarities with Jerzy Grotowski’s Poor Theatre. Sinéad Crowe observes that

both Artaud’s and Grotowski’s disapproval of those kinds of theater that offer entertainment echoes elements of the antitheatrical prejudice, in particular its puritanical disapproval of ‘putting on an act,’ ‘making a spectacle of oneself’ or ‘playing to the gallery.’... For Grotowski, theater should not involve exhibitionism and pretense, but rather authenticity and sincerity, and, paradoxically, he argued that acting is not about performing a role, but about laying bare the most intimate parts of the psyche. (“Religion in Contemporary German Drama” 37)

Crowe notes the way Grotowski’s refusal of acting in the theatre is expressed by the actor:

“The ideal actor, according to Grotowski, takes the *via negativa*, St. John of the Cross’s term for the ‘negative way’ ” (37). Grotowski himself described acting as “the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life” (Grotowski 178).

Acting has been discussed in anthropological terms. In *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985), for example, Richard Schechner uses the term “restored behavior” for “living behavior” which is then “rearranged or reconstructed” in performance or ritual (35). He describes this acting as being “not me ... not not me” (*Between Theater and Anthropology* 112). Victor Turner, in a discussion of “Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting” in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982), identifies a “liminal” zone between acting and living when he observes the changed notion of acting in modern theatre where “it is the *mundane* world that is false, illusory, the home of the *persona*, and theatre that is real” (116). He continues:

When we act in everyday life we do not merely re-act to indicative stimuli, we act in frames we have wrested from the genres of cultural performance. And when we act on the stage, whatever our stage may be, we must now in this reflexive age of psychoanalysis and semiotics as never before, bring into the symbolic or fictitious world the urgent problems of our reality. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 122)

⁷ As Martin Esslin described it in 1976: “Artaud’s insistence that Theatre is the double of Life, and Life the double of Theatre, has increasingly been vindicated. . . . Life is becoming increasingly theatricalized. The theatre is becoming more and more political and politics more and more theatrical” (*Artaud* 95).

Although these anthropologists and sociologists use theatrical terminology in a metaphorical way, sometimes they seem to look at life as literally theatrical, as the phrase “whatever our stage may be” might indicate.⁸

In my first chapter I discuss three theatrical and filmic works that explore a desire to refuse acting, both in theatre and in life (and as the result of a confusion between acting and living), in the context of fascist theatricality. The first work I examine, István Szabò’s film *Mephisto* (1981), features Hendrik Höfgen, an aspiring actor in Nazi Germany who finds success through acting the role of the devil Mephisto in Goethe’s *Faust*. This role of the devil that Höfgen plays is central to the exploration of acting that takes place in Szabò’s film. Considered to be the German national drama, Goethe’s *Faust* was one of the most performed plays during the 1930s in Nazi Germany.⁹ To the Nazis Faust represented the German nation - always striving - a man of action set against the devil, who is always negative and arguing, deceiving and acting but who in the end loses out against the German ideal. However, this interpretation was reversed by critics of the Nazi regime with the Nazis becoming the devils, seducing the German nation into selling its soul.

Szabò’s film was a treatment of Klaus Mann’s 1936 novel *Mephisto* (*Mephisto: Roman einer Karriere*, 1936) whose protagonist (Höfgen) is based on the real life of Gustaf Gründgens, a formerly close friend, brother-in-law and artistic collaborator of Mann. In order to examine Szabò’s film I begin the chapter with an analysis of Mann’s novel. Central both to Mann’s novel and to Szabò’s film is an exploration of the spectacular mixing of the political and the aesthetic that enabled the Nazis’ and Gründgens’ own confusion of acting and living to take place. I will detail the way Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Bertolt Brecht all wrote in condemnation of this phenomenon where acting and theatrical spectacle was used to seduce the German public into supporting Nazi policies throughout the 1930s. I will examine what was so seductive about fascist ‘acting’, how Mann and Szabò explain and represent the confusion of acting and living that occurred during fascism and why their representations end in Höfgen’s (Gründgens’) desire to refuse acting. Chapter One also includes an examination of the motivation behind the desire to represent Hitler in theatre and film as a comic devil or ham actor in films such as Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*

⁸ Marco de Marinis writes of theatrical performance as “closer in essence to the interactions of everyday life. . . . If life is also theatre... then theatre itself *also* involves *real* life” (qtd. in Bial 238-239). Neal Gabler discusses the way movies have become like life, and life like movies: “[L]ife has *become* art, so that the two are now indistinguishable from each other” (qtd. in Bial 74).

⁹ It was performed every year between 1932-1937 (“Access History Factbook”).

(1940), where comic acting is employed to ridicule and to refuse Hitler's own use of acting in life.

The second work I analyse in this chapter is *Faust Chroma* (2008), a theatrical production translated, adapted and directed by Peter Falkenberg for Free Theatre Christchurch of a play by Werner Fritsch originally titled *Colour Instruction for Chameleons* (*Chroma: Farbenlehre für Chamäleons*, 2002). Fritsch's play takes off from Mann's novel and Szabò's film, discarding the fictional use of "Höfgen", and focusing on Gründgens at the end of his life when he made the decision to refuse acting. The role Gründgens played as the devil Mephisto in Goethe's *Faust* is also central to Fritsch's text but the Faustian position of Gründgens in life that was initiated but not developed in Mann's novel (and Szabò's film), is the starting point for Fritsch's own exploration. As it is retold in Fritsch's text, having travelled to Manila in 1963, the character of Gründgens struggles to comprehend how what he determinedly believed was just acting and pretending, has turned him into a real life fascist collaborator. He contemplates the ways in which his whole life may have consisted only of acting. Fritsch represents Gründgens' attempt to refuse the acting in the theatre and the 'acting' in his everyday life that he feels he has substituted for really living.

I am interested in the way Gründgens' attempt on one hand to separate art and life but on the other to identify with his roles and to really 'live' in the theatre, is central to his confusion, its representation in Fritsch's play and its adaptation by Falkenberg. A text from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* is used in *Faust Chroma* and I will examine Nietzsche's arguments against acting in more depth in this section. Klaus Mann is also represented as a character and the representations of the suicides of both Mann and Gründgens are staged as refusals of 'acting'.

The third work in this chapter, *Enigma Emmy Göring* (2008), is another theatrical text written by Fritsch, directed by Falkenberg and produced by Free Theatre alongside *Faust Chroma*. In this play, set in the 1970s, the character Emmy Göring, like the representations of Gründgens, is also based on a real life person who acted in the theatre. In the play Emmy also experiences an awakening of confusion between acting and living during fascism, when she reflects back on her refusal of acting in the theatre upon her marriage to Nazi second in command Hermann Göring. *Enigma Emmy Göring* explores the way Emmy's 'acting' roles in life as a good wife and mother during fascism, may have been inspired by her playing of roles in the theatre such as Gretchen from *Faust*, but have (like in the representations of Gründgens) led to a reality that is not the one she imagined.

In my second chapter, I look at works that explore the refusal of acting in the context of sexual theatricality. I use as material Free Theatre's theatrical production of *Distraction Camp* (2009), also under the direction of Peter Falkenberg where Nietzsche's premise that acting and living are becoming increasingly hard to separate was explored further. The seeding text for this project was Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (*Le Balcon*, 1957). *The Balcony* is set in a brothel where ordinary men come to role-play their fantasies, taking powerful reverential figures in society as their models. Falkenberg selected the first three scenes from Genet's text comprising of three successive and generic sexual role-plays, and so I begin with a discussion of Genet's text to set up my analysis of its incarnation in *Distraction Camp*. Acting and its refusal is a central feature of sadomasochistic role-play and this is emphasised in the production as it is in Genet's play. There is also a revolution taking place outside of the brothel in Genet's play. Revolution could be seen as a refusal of the 'acting' of the status quo as it is seen to take place in society. When politics have become aesthetic (the argument I continue on from Chapter One) *Distraction Camp* asks whether the revolutionaries are really attempting to refuse the 'acting' or what is referred to in the play as "simulacrum" of the authority figures in society or whether they are also partisan to 'acting' themselves? Is a refusal of 'acting' possible? Has the desire to refuse 'acting' become integrated into the spectacle of revolution outside the brothel just as it has become integrated into the simulated sexual role-plays within it?

My analysis of *Distraction Camp* leads to a re-examination of Artaud's writing, which preceded Genet's own writing for the theatre. I will examine the way Artaud's writing influenced the performance of ritual elements in *Distraction Camp* and emphasised the sadomasochistic aspects in Genet's role-plays as they pointed to the sadomasochistic nature of power relationships in society. The audience's part in the theatrical spectacle was also incorporated into the production and this became important for the way in which the revolution, as a refusal of the acting in the brothel, was staged in this production. I will explain how the refusals of acting built into these role-plays were given further exploration in *Distraction Camp* by an acknowledgment of the actors playing these role-plays as themselves. I will also explain the way the physical and musical vocabulary of the tango, in its use of sadomasochistic role-play and seduction, not to mention its origins in the brothels of Argentina, was a complementary and provocative frame for the scenes from *The Balcony*. Towards the end of *Distraction Camp*, the parallels between sadomasochistic role-play and fascism are addressed and I examine them in the light of Susan Sontag's writing on fascism, Hitler's relationship with the masses, and the fascination with sadomasochistic role-play that

exists in our current society, perhaps as a release from the anxieties of simulation or ‘acting’ in everyday life. Klaus Theweleit, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s writing on the theatricality of fascist desire is pertinent to this discussion. In this context I also incorporate the arguments of feminists Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous who all take issue with the history of considering women to be seducers (or devils) who lie and pretend.

The second work I discuss in Chapter Two is Ang Lee’s film *Lust, Caution* (色, 戒, 2007) where the female protagonist takes sexual (sadoomasochistic) acting out of the theatre and into life, as a tool to refuse the Japanese occupation of her country. She must seduce her enemy in order to enable his assassination. However, at the most important moment she refuses to act out her role and is consequently executed. *Lust, Caution*, presents the problem of the protagonist’s inability to avoid the efficacy of her acting – in her case the act(ing) of love. But I will also discuss an alternative reading that her refusal to act, like Fritsch’s representation of Emmy Göring’s desire to leave the theatre and get married, is perhaps simply her taking on a different acting role, one perhaps inspired by Hollywood film. Slavoj Žižek’s argument about suicide as an ultimate act of refusal and refusal of ‘acting’ is of use in considering her act in feminist terms.

In Chapter Three I look at three films that explore the refusal of theatricality altogether. The breaking down of the traditional stage space in the theatre by Artaud and Grotowski and others led to an increase of acting in public spaces. At the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, performative interventions into everyday life by such people as Alan Kaprow became known as happenings, fluxus performance, action art and performance art. They occurred alongside the cultural revolution, where bourgeois acting was refused and rebelled against and where groups like the Living Theatre directed by Julian Beck and Judith Malina and The Performance Group directed by Schechner, developed interactive political performances and Environmental Theatre. Herbert Marcuse’s emphasis on the role of art to refuse oppression in society was a source of influence on the desire amongst artists of that era to refuse acting in theatre and in life. The deliberate confusion of acting and living that happenings created led to the European happenings of radical artists like Wolf Vostell and Jean-Jacques Lebel which became a part of the protest movement against the ruling authorities. I discuss the way these happenings can be seen as a realisation of Artaud’s aims and also the way modern day terrorism such as the 9/11 attacks in America are discussed by

some critics and artists including Baudrillard, Stockhausen, Žižek and Schechner as the epitome of avant-garde performances (or a refusal of ‘acting’) in a culture of simulation.

Andy Warhol started making films during the period of the happenings. I will use *The Chelsea Girls* (1966) to discuss the way the documentary-like nature of his films echoed the theatrical happenings of the time where the twelve reels that make up the film result from Warhol’s refusal of directing, in setting up the camera in one position, pushing play and simply recording his “Superstars” in their everyday life activities. Key to what I discuss here is the way the refusal of acting that takes place in *The Chelsea Girls* is exposing the ‘acting’ and role-playing that is an inherent part of the ‘real’ lives of Warhol’s self-made “Superstars”. I discuss Warhol’s early interest in suicide, which may have been as a refusal of ‘acting’ in life, and which I connect to Žižek’s argument in my second chapter. I also look at the way in which acting and suicide combined in the ‘acting’ life of Edie Sedgwick, Warhol’s most famous blonde “Superstar”. His films were the predecessors of the more recent phenomenon of reality television and I explore the way in which its appeal may be in its refusal of acting.

Chapter Three also looks at *The Idiots* (*Idioterne*, 1998) directed by Lars von Trier, the second film of the Dogme 95 movement. *The Idiots* is a fictional film that uses elements of “reality television” as its content and form in an attempt to achieve a more authentic ‘reality film’. *The Idiots* presents a group of people who use ‘spassing’ (acting the idiot) in public as a refusal of the ‘acting’ of bourgeois society. I will examine how, when Karen (the newest member of the group) takes acting out into everyday life by ‘spassing’ in front of her family at the end of the film, it can be seen as an ultimate refusal of ‘acting’. I also examine the similarities that ‘spassing’ has to the refusal of acting of the protagonist in Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966), which was an inspiration for *The Idiots*.

The most recent and final film I look at in this chapter is Casey Affleck’s *I’m Still Here* (2010) starring Joaquin Phoenix. In this film, which was initially described as a documentary by its filmmakers, acting is refused in response to a yearning for something more authentic than the lies and illusions peddled in Hollywood. Not only does Phoenix refuse acting by appearing as himself in the film, he is also documented refusing to ‘act’ in his everyday life the role of celebrity that the public had expected. I will discuss the way these refusals result in a confusion and crisis for Phoenix that culminates both within the film and outside of it. Phoenix’s crisis is one that is reflected in all the works in this thesis where the desire to refuse acting is an expression of a desire for the ethical as against the aesthetic. But what I explore throughout this thesis is how in performances of theatre and film,

everyday life - the place of the ethical - is becoming usurped by the aesthetic and how the aesthetic is becoming the only place where the ethical seems possible.

Chapter One: Refusal in Fascist Theatricality

Written in exile, Klaus Mann's novel *Mephisto* (1936) explores the comparison between the Nazis and actors in an only thinly disguised autobiographical way. The title *Mephisto* refers to the key event in the protagonist Hendrik Höfgen's (Gustaf Gründgens') life in Berlin during the rise of fascism when he acted the part of the devil Mephisto in Goethe's *Faust*. In the chapter titled "The Pact with the Devil", Höfgen acts as the devil Mephisto onstage in front of an audience that includes the Nazi "prime minister" also referred to as the "fat general". This was Mann's pseudonym for Hermann Göring who was second in command to Hitler, Head of the Luftwaffe and Chief of the Prussian State Theatre during this period. Höfgen, in full costume and makeup as Mephisto, is invited during the interval to meet the Nazi prime minister in his box. This is based on the real event during the infamous 1932-33 season of *Faust* directed by Max Reinhardt where Gründgens is reported to have met Hermann Göring for the first time in these circumstances (Green 38). The meeting is described by Mann in the novel as if it were the acting out of the pact scene from *Faust*:

Was he congratulating him on his magnificent performance? It looked more like the sealing of a pact between the potentate and the actor. In the orchestra people strained their eyes and ears. They devoured the scene in the box above as though it was the most exceptional entertainment, an entrancing pantomime entitled 'The Actor Bewitches the Prince.' (K. Mann, *Mephisto* 180)

This Faustian analogy is also hinted at retrospectively at the beginning of the next chapter where "The audience had to wait; and they did so with pleasure: the scene in the ministerial box was far more absorbing than *Faust*" (181).

This theatrical analogy placed onto everyday life suggests that Höfgen (the actor) acts as the devil in life as he did on stage, seducing Göring (the Nazi prince), who takes up the Faustian position as German hero. However, this analogy cannot escape its context. As the prime minister is in a position of power and influence from which to help Höfgen's career aspirations, it can also be read conversely that the prime minister takes on the attributes of the devil/Mephisto in making a deal with Höfgen who takes on the attributes of Faust selling his soul (political convictions) to the devil (Nazis) in the pursuit of fame and fortune. This second reading is confirmed in the final words of the chapter where Höfgen thinks to himself: "Now I have sold myself... Now I am marked for life..." (180). Just as in the *Faust* legend where the devil Mephisto tempts Faust, in Mann's novel the Nazis can also be seen to

deceive and manipulate their public, promising to fulfil its desire to become Godlike (Höfgen's career ambitions) in order to seduce it into complicity with their regime. Mann's use of this analogy in the novel details what followed this meeting in real life. After the end of the performance season of the 1932-33 production it was a matter of weeks before the Nazi party came to power and it was the next year that Gründgens, in spite of his socialist sympathies, accepted Göring's offer of the role of Director of the Prussian State Theatre. As Mann wrote in his autobiography, Gründgens became "the Führer of theatrical life in the Third Reich" (*The Turning Point* 281). However, this "pact with the devil" is as far as the Faustian analogy is explored in Mann's novel.

Mann's fictional comparison of the actor Gründgens with the Nazis as actors in political life may have stemmed from his private experiences with Gründgens. In Mann's novel, the characters Sebastian and Barbara are pseudonyms for himself and his sister Erika. Klaus and Erika Mann had worked together with Gründgens as actors in the mid-1920s and shared the same socialist convictions. The plays that they wrote and performed in were based on their experiences together offstage and in this way acting became connected with living. They experimented with playing their own lives onstage and vice versa. In 1925 they created the play *Anja and Esther* (*Anja und Esther*), written by Klaus Mann and directed by Gründgens, it was inspired by the real life relationships between Gründgens, Erika Mann, Klaus Mann and Pamela Wedekind (the daughter of playwright Frank Wedekind). During the run of *Anja and Esther* it is believed that Gründgens, who as well as directing acted the role of Jakob, had an affair with both Erika and Klaus Mann, who also shared a close (and it was often rumoured, sexual) relationship. Gründgens went on to marry Erika. Klaus Mann (who played Kaspar) was at this time engaged to Pamela who was in turn having a relationship with Erika; and this love relationship appears as the central theme in the play between the characters Anja and Esther (played by Erika and Pamela respectively). As Andrea Weiss notes, "the offstage entanglements between the foursome which developed during the production of *Anja and Esther* were as confusing as those enacted in front of the audience" (50). By acting both in the theatre and in everyday life, Klaus Mann and Gründgens may have considered everything they did to be a kind of playacting, not quite real.

During this time, and before his success as Mephisto in the 1932 production of *Faust*, Gründgens had developed a career for himself playing devil-like characters "[s]omewhat against his own wishes" (Steinberg). One of Gründgens' most popular early successes was starring in Fritz Lang's film *M* (1931), playing the charismatic head of the criminal underworld whose gang beats the police in catching and condemning a murderer of young

girls. Gründgens' surge in popularity following the film could be attributed to his role as a fascinating and seductive 'bad guy'. While Klaus and Erika Mann were active against the growing Nazi threat in Germany, Gründgens continued to seek success as an actor in Berlin. Like their fictional counterparts, Gründgens and Erika Mann divorced in 1929, their respective artistic lives taking different directions. Gründgens believed that art should have no connection to reality, proclaiming in a 1932 speech:

Today the opera is the clearest expression of 'art for art's sake,' behind which one tries to hide from the day. It distracts one, jolts one, ennobles one – outside of his real life... Theater-going today should not be a continuation of the sorrow-tattered day; it should carry one off to another, better world, whose sorrows and worries do not resemble ours and to which there is miraculously no connection. (qtd. in Green 128)

Erika and Klaus Mann had an entirely opposite view of the function of art. In 1933, the year Gründgens met and befriended Hermann Göring, Erika Mann founded and acted in *Die Pfeffermühle* (The Peppermill), an anti-Nazi cabaret in which Klaus also participated. Erika Mann commented about the cabaret: "I know, that such a cabaret stage is almost meaningless compared to the great world stage. But even so, I also know that every artistic work must have its convictions... We try, in the light manner that we have chosen, to say the difficult things that must be said today" (qtd. in Weiss 108-9). Unlike Gründgens, Klaus and Erika did not separate their artistic aims from their political ones. For this reason they were unable to remain in Germany once the Nazis got into power, going into exile later that year along with many artists, intellectuals, homosexuals, communists and Jews escaping persecution, censorship and in many cases certain torture and death.¹⁰

Mann's novel was published immediately in Amsterdam and France in 1936 but banned in Germany. When a Paris daily newspaper advertised it as a *roman à clef*, Klaus Mann strongly insisted he was not out to write a story about particular persons (Maltzan 60). It seems that for legal reasons and in order to be published he had to conceal the connection the novel had to Gründgens. Later, in his autobiography *The Turning Point* (*Der Wendepunkt*, 1942), Mann is forthcoming about his intention to write about Gründgens but also that Gründgens served as an exemplar of the type of behaviour that was his target:

I visualize my ex-brother-in-law as the traitor par excellence, the macabre embodiment of corruption and cynicism. So intense was the fascination of his shameful glory that I decided to portray Mephisto-Gründgens in a satirical

¹⁰ In 1937 the Nazis staged a public exhibition called 'entartete Kunst' (degenerate art) an absurd and ironic showcasing of the work of artists which (one assumes because of the artists' personal lives and political convictions) did not fit fascist criteria - yet another example of the inability to separate art and politics.

novel. I thought it pertinent, indeed, necessary to expose and analyze the abject type of the treacherous intellectual who prostitutes his talent for the sake of some tawdry fame and transitory wealth. Gustaf was just one among others – in reality as well as in the composition of my narrative. (282)¹¹

After the war Gründgens was arrested, spent seven months in an internment camp and in 1946 was declared anti-fascist and entitled to resume his acting career (Green 62-3).

The character of Sebastian in *Mephisto*, who Klaus Mann based on himself, describes Höfgen (Gründgens): “He’s always lying and he never lies. His falseness is his truth – it sounds complicated, but actually it’s quite simple. He believes everything and he believes nothing. He is an actor” (K. Mann, *Mephisto* 130). Klaus Mann committed suicide on 21st May 1949 a short time after receiving a letter from his publisher dated 5th May advising that *Mephisto* would not be published in Germany. Klaus Mann had given up acting in the theatre in order to pursue an ethical life outside it, even though this meant being exiled from his own country. Upon his return he may have discovered, as the character of Sebastian notes in his novel, that the acting he had refused in the theatre because of its connection to political life in fascism had continued in another form in the real life of post-war capitalism and his suicide can be seen as the only way he saw left to refuse it.¹²

The rejection of Mann’s novel for publication is evidence that even decades after the Nazis were defeated it was in the interest of the conservative authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany to uphold the idea of the separation of the political and the cultural life in Nazi Germany. The connection of the political and the aesthetic was disavowed by the German State, which denied that it ever made the “pact with the devil” that Klaus (and his father Thomas Mann) had written about. Yet the connection of the political and the aesthetic

¹¹ The second major exploration of the devil in relation to the Nazis (although not as actors) was by Klaus Mann’s father, the author Thomas Mann, who started his novel *Doctor Faustus* (*Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde*) in 1943, publishing it in 1947. Thomas Mann later described “the central idea: the flight from the difficulties of the cultural crisis into the pact with the devil, the craving of a proud mind, threatened by sterility, for an unblocking of inhibitions at any cost, and the parallel between pernicious euphoria ending in collapse with the nationalistic frenzy of fascism” (T. Mann 30).

¹² Jessica Green notes that Mann’s suicide in Cannes occurred in the same city as the suicide of his protagonist in *Meeting Place in Infinity* (*Treffpunkt im Unendlichen*, 1932), also an autobiographical work of fiction set during the rise of the Nazis and where the protagonist Sebastian is based on Klaus Mann himself (just as the character Sebastian is in *Mephisto*). It appears therefore that Mann carried out in his real life the fictional suicide he had written for the character based on himself in his novel. Sebastian’s motivation to commit suicide in the novel is in response to his betrayal by a character Gregor Gregori based on Gründgens. It seems possible that Mann’s suicide - in the same place that the fictionalised suicide of a character based on himself in response to the actions of a character based on Gründgens and that he had written seventeen years earlier - had the direct intention of implicating Gründgens. Newspapers accused Gründgens of responsibility for Mann’s suicide because of his attempts to block the publication of *Mephisto*, though Gründgens emphatically denied the connection (Green 77-78).

was a fundamental desire that the fascists celebrated. Goebbels, for example, wrote: “We feel ourselves as more than politicians, but also as artistic individuals. I am even of the opinion that politics is the highest form of art, because sculptors shape stone [...] and poets shape words. The statesman, however, shapes the masses so that the masses emerge as a people” (qtd. in Ordinaire 128).

The idea that the political and the aesthetic had a correlation in fascism found its well known expression in Walter Benjamin’s 1935 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” when he wrote: “The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life” (680). Benjamin, who was in exile in France at the time, saw that the theatrical spectacle of fascism in Germany allowed the masses a chance to express themselves, but he saw this aestheticising of political life as destructive: “All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (680). He also made a comparison between the fascist period and the period of the Ancient Greeks: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic” (681).

Central to Hitler and the Nazis’ popular success during the rise of fascism was their use of spectacle as “Gesamtkunstwerk” (Total Work of Art). This concept was developed by Wagner in the mid-19th Century to describe a combined spectacle of music, theatre, literature and visual arts. Wagner based this form on what he admired in the Ancient Greek dramas which were central to the functioning of the Ancient Greek polis: powerful, religious spectacles, which asserted and enacted the central beliefs and values of the state. However, unlike Wagner, who reserved his explorations of “Gesamtkunstwerk” to the stage, Hitler was inspired to use it in political life, representing the Third Reich in highly theatrical and operatic rallies and public spectacles. Hitler and Goebbels took theatre and acting out of the State auditorium and into the streets to gain support for and demonstrate fascist ideology, and politicians in this ritualised spectacle of Fascism became actors in their own propaganda performances.

In an essay from *Der Messingkauf*, “On the Theatricality of Fascism,” (“Über die Theatricalität des Faschismus”, 1939-40), Bertolt Brecht examined the way the “oppressors of our time” have taken acting out of the theatre and into life: “There is no doubt that the fascists behaved especially theatrically. They have a special sense for that. They themselves speak of stage direction and they have introduced a whole heap of effects directly from the

theatre: the spotlights and the musical accompaniment, the choirs and the surprises” (560).¹³ Brecht gives as an example of the way the Nazis gave political propaganda theatrical expression with the burning of the Reichstag where “the communist danger was dramatized and made into an effect” (560). Brecht especially directed his attention to Hitler and the way he developed his public persona like an actor:

An actor told me years ago that Hitler took lessons from the court actor Basil in Munich, not only in diction but also in behaviour. For example, he learnt to walk the onstage strutting of the hero where one presses the knee down and puts the full sole on the floor to make the walk majestic. He also learnt the most impressive way to cross his arms and he also studied the relaxed position. (561)

Brecht notes that the acting learnt by Hitler in life was in order to pretend to be someone he was not: “It is true that we see an attempt here to deceive the people because they are to accept something which is studied and alien to him as the natural behavior of a great man” (“On the Theatricality...” 561). He also notes the irony that Hitler’s acting coach was a ham actor: “He also imitated an actor who when he himself came onstage caused hilarity with the younger crowd through his unnatural behavior” (561). Brecht explored this phenomenon of Hitler as an actor in his satirical play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (*Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*, 1941) written in exile the year after his essay. The play is a parable on the rise of Hitler and the Nazis set in Chicago with Arturo Ui as ‘head gangster’. In one comic scene an actor is recruited to teach Ui (Hitler) how to perform in public.

Brecht’s play represents Hitler as a comic actor. In medieval representations the devil was also a comic role, which had the function of making his representation less threatening and alleviating the audience’s fears. This appears to have been applied to representations of Hitler.¹⁴ In Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* Hitler is put into the context of simply another of Chaplin’s comic roles as Chaplin uses Hitler’s voice, gest and behaviour and presents them as the tools of a comic actor.¹⁵ Chaplin stated: “A Hitler story was an opportunity for burlesque and pantomime” (Chaplin 424-5). He describes his reaction in the

¹³ These excerpts are based on an informal translation of Brecht’s essay by Peter Falkenberg. This short essay from Brecht’s *Der Messingkauf* is left out of John Willett’s English translation of the work.

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin sees the commedia character of Harlequin developing out of the comic representations of the devil in medieval theatre. For further discussion see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*. 1965. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984: 267, 347-49.

¹⁵ In *The Great Dictator* Chaplin plays both Hitler and a Jewish barber. In a passage in Brecht’s play, which was made the year after and could have been a reference to *The Great Dictator*, Ui crosses his arms over his chest, but the actor recruited to coach Hitler suggests that this is too common: “You don’t want to look like a barber, Mr Ui” (Brecht, “The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui” 159). Jost Hermand however thinks it highly unlikely that the film would have been available at that time in Finland where Brecht was exiled (Berghahn and Hermand 181).

early 1930s when he was given a series of photographs of Hitler making a speech: “The face was obscenely comic – a bad imitation of me, with its absurd moustache, unruly, stringy hair and disgusting, thin, little mouth. I could not take Hitler seriously” (345).¹⁶ Goebbels and Göring are represented in the film along with Hitler, as playing roles in life like actors play roles in the theatre. They are ridiculed as inauthentic ham actors implying that they are successful with their mass audiences precisely because they are ham actors. This trend, in theatre and film, to ridicule Hitler via his representation as a comic actor, could be a way of refusing his ‘acting’ and its power.

Klaus Mann however was unimpressed with Chaplin’s use of comic acting to represent Hitler: “There can be no doubt that *The Great Dictator* is the most problematic, if not the poorest picture Charlie Chaplin has ever made. It has no style, no continuity, no convincing power. . . . The main disappointment is that Chaplin, whose genius is not without its truly demonic side, fails to display it where it is required more urgently than ever before” (“What’s Wrong with Anti-Nazi Films?” 178). It is the satire that Mann criticises in particular: “You don’t unmask the essential insanity of Hitler’s world-conquering dream by presenting a third-rate mime in an SS uniform fumbling about with a stick in front of a map or a globe” (181). Mann’s reaction to the film is perhaps surprising given his own use of political satire to represent the Nazis but may be understood in the context of his closer intimacy with the brutalities of the Nazi regime and he may have been sensitive to Hollywood using it for entertainment purposes. In his autobiography a year later Mann specifically defines his protagonist Höfgen as a comedian: “He is not a person, only a comedian...the comedian becomes an exponent, a symbol of a thoroughly comedic, deeply untrue and unreal regime. The actor triumphs in the country of liars and pretenders” (qtd. in Green 54). Yet he wrote of the impossibility of representing the Nazis in a comic way for this reason: “[I]t was impossible to exaggerate the Nazi outrages: they matched, indeed surpassed the boldest parody” (*The Turning Point* 241). Chaplin also went on to acknowledge that comic acting fails in its attempt to refuse Hitler’s ‘acting’ power, when he later stated: “Had I known of the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made *The Great Dictator*; I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis” (Chaplin 426).

Adorno, along with Horkheimer (who published Benjamin’s 1935 article) wrote in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944) about the theatricality of fascism

¹⁶ André Bazin claims: “Hitler had stolen Chaplin’s mustache and *The Great Dictator* was his way of getting even” (qtd. in Insdorf 64).

and the aestheticising of politics. Their description of the Nazis as bad or comic actors is influenced by Chaplin's film:

They look like hairdressers, provincial actors, and hack journalists. Part of their moral influence consists precisely in the fact that they are powerless in themselves but deputize for all the other powerless individuals, and embody the fullness of power for them, without themselves being anything other than the vacant spaces taken up accidentally by power. . . . The 'leaders' have become what they already were in a less developed form throughout the bourgeois era: actors playing the part of leaders. (Adorno and Horkheimer 236-7)

Unlike Mann, Adorno and Horkheimer initially viewed Chaplin's representation of Hitler as a successful political weapon: "One important component of the fight against Fascism is to cut the inflated 'Führer' images down to size. Chaplin's *Great Dictator* touched on the core of the problem by showing the similarity between the ghetto barber and the dictator" (237).

However, in a 1962 essay in which he discusses political art Adorno writes:

[T]he buffoonery of fascism, evoked by Chaplin as well, was at the same time also its ultimate horror. . . . *The Great Dictator* loses all satirical force, and becomes obscene, when a Jewish girl can bash a line of storm troopers on the head with a pan without being torn to pieces. For the sake of political commitment, political reality is trivialized: which then reduces the political effect. (Adorno, "Commitment" 308)¹⁷

The alternative of representing Hitler in a serious way has also been problematic. One example is the performance of renowned dramatic actor Bruno Ganz in the film *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004). Ganz's naturalistic acting approach, because of its attempt to achieve empathy with Hitler, was criticised by some audiences of the film. Others were determined to distance themselves to it via comedy. One notorious scene from the film in

¹⁷ Satirizing the Nazis as comic actors did not stop with Chaplin's film. *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) directed by Ernst Lubitsch also used the device of acting to satirize the Third Reich. In Lubitsch's film a troupe of Polish actors make a play about the rise of Hitler. Comedy emerges in one scene from the conflict between the actors' desire to entertain, and the director's desire to create a serious drama about the Third Reich, however, "all these roles explode in the face of the sudden invasion: the actors now know that 'the Nazis are putting on a bigger show than ours,' and that 'there are no censors to stop them' " (Insdorf 68). Gerd Gemünden writes that the film proves "that the reality of Nazism is performative, and that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (68). Like Lubitsch, Mel Brooks' film *The Producers* (1968) also used as material an attempted theatrical production about Hitler. Said Brooks: "I want to thank Hitler – for being such a funny guy on the stage" (Mel Brooks qtd. in Berghahn and Hermand). Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) was a popular and commercially successful film which explicitly satirizes the Third Reich through the device of acting. The protagonist, played by Benigni himself, pretends for his son that the war and concentration camp they are interred in is just an acting game. A more recent satirical film that features Hitler as an actor is Daniel Levy's *My Führer: The Truly Truest Truth about Adolf Hitler* (*Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler*) (distributed in English as *My Führer*, 2007). In this film, a Jewish actor, Adolf Grünbaum, is recruited from Sachsenhausen concentration camp to coach a depressed Hitler for one of his final speeches. Grünbaum as Hitler's Jewish doppelgänger is a reference to Chaplin's playing of both the Jew and Hitler in *The Great Dictator*.

which Ganz as Hitler gets irate at his officers, became a YouTube sensation, re-subtitled in hundreds of parodies to comical effect. Attempts to represent Hitler seriously seem to inevitably involve a negotiation with his image as a ham actor, which seems to not allow serious representation via empathetic acting¹⁸

Another strategy in theatre and film has been to refuse to act Hitler altogether. This is arrived at in the final speech of *The Great Dictator* where Chaplin plays dual roles as a Jewish barber and as Adenoid Hynkel (Hitler). In the final scene the Jewish barber is forced to impersonate Hynkel in a speech to the masses. As he begins the speech in a low unexpressive voice, it appears that the Jewish barber is refusing to act as Hynkel and speaking instead as himself. Half way through his speech he builds to a fervor using Hynkel's acting gestures to rouse the masses against fascism: "Brutes have risen to power, but they lie. . . . Let us fight to free the world. . . . Let us all unite!" At this point when the barber appears to have embraced fascist acting (though to anti-fascist ends), he turns and delivers the rest of the speech to the camera. Now it appears it is not the barber delivering the performance to his audience in the film, but Chaplin himself to the audience in the cinema. His speech still retains a cathartic sentimentality and this may be the reason Mann criticised it in particular: "Mr Chaplin's concluding harangue is almost unbearably trite" ("What's Wrong with Anti-Nazi Films?" 178). When politics have become aesthetic, whatever the politics happens to be is secondary to the way it is performed.

Chaplin's direct address to the camera, however, as a possible attempt to refuse acting as a refusal of Hitler, anticipated Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's refusal of acting Hitler in his seven hour long representation of Hitler in *Hitler: a film from Germany (Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland, 1977)*.¹⁹ The film uses puppets, actors who directly address the camera, manikins, puppeteers, projections, voice-overs, archived recordings, theatrical stage sets, music and opera to explore how fascism came into existence, why the German people desired fascism and what our fascination with Hitler is based on today. There is no attempt to represent Hitler either through documentary images or through impersonation by an actor. A voice-over states near the beginning of the film: "This is a film for us. What would Hitler be

¹⁸ Hitler and the Nazis have been used by Hollywood and other film industries numerous times to represent the most seductive and ultimate villains (devils). This is profitable for Hollywood in their representations of heroic victory over evil and has also been propagated by the Germans themselves. Michael D. Richardson notes that in film "in the past 60 years – nearly 80 actors have portrayed Hitler, ranging from bit players to major stars such as Anthony Hopkins and Alec Guinness" (Machtans and Ruehl 133). Other films featuring either Hitler or the Nazis in general include *Schindler's List* (1993), *Speer & Hitler: The Devil's Architect* (2005), *Valkyrie* (2008) and *Inglorious Basterds* (2009).

¹⁹ The American English release added "Our" to the title, to make it *Our Hitler: a film from Germany*.

without us?”²⁰ The association of Hitler with the devil is also explored in several scenes. In a discussion of Syberberg’s film, Thomas Elsaesser describes the Nazis:

Hitler and his henchmen are puppets of the will of the masses, whom both democracy and dictatorship have brought into being, but once ‘on stage’, performing their ‘show’, with all the instruments that modern technology of mass media and mechanized warfare puts at their disposal, these agent-actors cast their own spell and create their own spectacular-phantasmorgoric reality. One is reminded again of Adorno’s modern subjects, who both ‘suffer [from] and identify with’ the powers that ‘determine the [opaque] social processes’ ruling their lives. (qtd. in Machtans and Ruehl 83)

In Syberberg’s representation of the Nazis, Hitler and the masses take turns at being puppet and puppet master in a symbiotic relationship comparable to Faust and Mephisto’s.

Mephisto (1981) István Szabò

In 1981 István Szabò presented *Mephisto*, a cinematic interpretation of Klaus Mann’s novel starring Klaus Maria Brandauer as Höfgen.²¹ Using cinematic techniques, Szabò’s film emphasises and expands on Mann’s central theme of the Nazis as actors and liars and culminates in an additional scene where Höfgen refuses acting. The scene from Mann’s novel where Höfgen meets the prime minister for the first time in his box at the theatre, is presented with shot-reverse-shot close-ups between the Nazi prime minister and Höfgen still dressed as Mephisto. Like in the novel, their handshake symbolises the “pact with the devil” that is central to the Faust myth. And as in the novel, this suggests first of all that the Nazi prime minister is in the Faustian position and Höfgen represents the devil, but in a reversal of roles and in the context of everyday life, the Nazi prime minister comes across as the more devilish and dangerous of the two and Höfgen is shown in the Faustian position, seduced into “selling his soul” to the Nazis and becoming one of them.

These simultaneous readings of the shot-reverse-shot sequence (where the theatrical and the political mirror each other) produce a mirroring and coming together of two different

²⁰ Tabori wrote *Mein Kampf* (1987) with the similar aim to Syberberg, to confront the “Hitler in mir” (Hitler in me) (Crowe, *Religion in Contemporary German Drama* 84). In Tabori’s play, one of the most successful theatrical comedies about the Nazis in Germany, Frau Death comes at the end to collect Hitler, positioning him as a Faust figure who is seduced by the devil in the form of a woman.

²¹ Two years before, in 1979, Ariane Mnouchkine directed a theatrical production based on Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* in France with her company Le Théâtre du Soleil. Sue-Ellen Case, who attended a performance in Berlin, noted that, “black market copies of the novel were sold in the foyer” (Case, “Mephisto (Review)” 298). No doubt Mnouchkine’s production helped propel and revive interest in efforts to publish Mann’s novel, which succeeded two years later. Staged in a warehouse comprising of two opposing stages, Case reports that the different styles of theatre on these two stages illustrated the way acting in the theatre during Nazi Germany was connected to the society outside of it, whether it demonstrated a fascist or anti-fascist perspective (Case 298).

devils where they can see in each other what is also in themselves. This mirroring trope is used to represent the symbiotic relationship between the roles of Faust and Mephisto, and is repeated throughout the film in multiple scenes where Höfgen stares at his own image in the mirror, “a doubled creature – both Mephisto and Faust” (Christensen, “Collaboration in István Szabó’s *Mephisto*” 23). As Alain Piette notes: “The metaphor of the mirror is central. The reversed image represents Mephisto: the original, however, is Faust” (Piette). Insdorf describes the way the spectator to the film is also in a mirrored relationship with Höfgen: “Cinema means identification – to live and feel something together – and to meet yourself in a mirror. This actor who works with the Nazis is us during the film” (Insdorf 163). The second half of the scene is shot in wide angle from the vantage point of the stage showing the audience looking up at the ‘scene’ being played out in the box. The deal Höfgen is making in everyday life with the Nazi prime minister is presented here as a theatrical one which has required willing ‘actors’ and ‘spectators’.

The film begins with a spotlight on a theatre stage. A female performer, Dora Martin, appears and performs to the rapture of an audience whose delighted faces appear in cutaway close-ups. This sequence is followed by a scene backstage where Höfgen is throwing things around in a dressing room in rage and despair. We learn that he cannot bear to witness someone else achieving success with an audience and would prefer to be in the spotlight himself. This opening scene establishes Höfgen’s fierce career ambition to be a famous actor.²² Becoming a famous actor in fascist Germany requires Höfgen to collaborate with the Nazis. In order to justify this he insists (as did Gründgens) on a separation between his acting in theatre and film and his political stance. The film shows on the contrary how his acting life and the political life during the period of fascism are inextricably linked. In one scene Höfgen is shown walking across a courtyard in some fine clothes. It is not until the director calls out “Cut!” and we get a shot of the film crew that we realise that Höfgen was just acting and that we were watching a shot from the film within the film that he was acting in. This deliberate confusion of everyday life and performance plays with our ability to distinguish the difference between Höfgen’s acting in film and his behaviour in everyday life. And it reflects Höfgen’s own diminished ability to differentiate between the two as the film progresses.

²² As it did with Gründgens, acting the role of Mephisto in Szabó’s film launched Brandauer’s acting career as a player of villains, particularly in film. In 1983 he played the villain Maximillian Largo in *Never Say Never Again*, a remake of the 1965 James Bond film *Thunderball*. The Bond villain is one of the devils of our time in contemporary cinema. Brandauer can be seen to have been seduced from the high art of the Burg Theatre in Vienna to the low art and ham acting of Hollywood.

This cinematic technique occurs again in another sequence from the film shoot when Höfgen is riding on a horse dressed like an Emperor alongside his cavalry. Once again the film displays the camera's perspective of the film within the film, abruptly breaking this when the director intervenes and calls out to Höfgen that the Reichstag has been burned down by the Nazis. The 'reality' created in the mise-en-scène of the image is revealed to us as a fiction within the larger narrative. However this newly revealed 'reality' is also 'acting' if, as Brecht suggested, the burning of the Reichstag was also a theatrical act of fascist politics. This interjection of 'reality' can also not escape containing remnants of the scene from the period film Höfgen is acting in that it is juxtaposed into, where the Nazis burning down of the Reichstag stands in for what might be anti-royalists rebelling against the monarchy. Scenes like this suggest to an audience that for Höfgen there is ultimately no difference between his behaviour in everyday life and his acting in theatre and film - that he acts and pretends all the time, just like the devil and just like the Nazis. As such, the film reflects the ethos of Mann's novel. Given the establishment of his acting ambition in the opening scene of the film it can be read that in order to achieve success as an actor Höfgen (Gründgens) was seduced into continuing his acting in everyday life in his dealings with the Nazis.²³

This confusing or merging of acting in the theatre and 'acting' in life in Szabó's film occurs again within the context of a theatrical rehearsal of *Faust*. In this scene Höfgen is shown in rehearsal as Mephisto. Miklas, a fellow actor who has been humiliated by Höfgen and despises him, plays the student. They are in their everyday clothes and therefore it appears initially to the viewer of the film that they are not acting. Even when it becomes clear they are acting in a theatrical rehearsal, neither can separate the infusion of their acting with their hatred for each other in real life. Miklas cannot conceal his sarcasm and humiliation when he says as the student: "I've only been here a short space, I come with a humility to this place... to find a teacher of vocation who's held by all in veneration." In this scene they are

²³ Szabó's interest in adapting Mann's novel may have been in order to come to terms with the consequences of his own ambition as a film director and his 'role' within the communist regime when he was a student. Fifteen years after making *Mephisto* it was revealed that Szabó had been an informant for the communist secret police after the Hungarian revolution: "[B]etween 1957 and 1961 he gave three successive police officers forty-eight reports on seventy-two people, nearly all of them his schoolmates and teachers at the Theater and Film Academy" (Deák). When his past was made public Szabó defended his actions: "I talked nonsense to distract attention from the person we had to protect. . . . The state security job was the bravest and most daring endeavor of my life because we saved one of our classmates after the revolution of 1956 from exposure and certain hanging" ("Oscar-winning film-maker was communist informant"). But a few weeks later Szabó apologised for lying saying that he hadn't been "authorized" to tell the truth, and gave another explanation for his collaboration: "I knew I lacked the fortitude to withstand beatings, or having to give up attendance at the film director's academy" (qtd. in Jonas). Szabó may have made *Mephisto* in an attempt to come to terms with his own 'acting' (lying and pretending) during this period.

rehearsing, Mephisto is, significantly, in disguise as Faust. It can be read here that Miklas sees through Höfgen's acting charade even if the character he is playing can't see through Mephisto's. In another scene from *Faust* shown in the film, this time during a performance, Höfgen plays Mephisto in a scene where he is disguised as a student in a conversation with Faust. Therefore, two of the three *Faust* sequences in the film show Mephisto acting in disguise: "[T]he film stresses from Goethe's play Mephisto's qualities as an actor" (Christensen, "Collaboration in István Szabó's *Mephisto*" 24).²⁴

The connection between acting and the Nazis is further explored when the prime minister says to Höfgen one evening at his residence:

I've discovered your secret. It's the surprise effect, right? The unexpected. I've been watching the way you appear on stage. Always different. Sometimes quick, erratic. Then slow, suddenly, when the audience is lulled. But always surprising and unpredictable. Thus you create the feeling of something original even if the spectator knows your lines by heart. And your glib tongue, your deliberate pauses, your precise emphasis. I think I'm learning from you.

Here the Nazi prime minister recognises that the skills of an actor are not dissimilar to the skills needed for a politician to woo a crowd. Right after he has said this Höfgen uses his charm to start pleading to save his friend Otto Ulrichs, lying when he says that he believes Ulrichs has given up his communist beliefs. Ironically, he can be seen to be utilising the acting skills that the prime minister has just praised him for, in life, and the prime minister doesn't seem oblivious to this fact when granting Höfgen's request. The film shows that there is complicity in the lying that is required to be a Nazi. In an interview Szabó describes Höfgen and the prime minister as "two actors in love, speaking about the problems of their craft" (Insdorf 162). In a paraphrasing of the line from the novel the prime minister says to Höfgen in another scene: "Isn't there a bit of Mephisto in every German? Wouldn't our enemies love it if we had nothing but the soul of Faust? No, Mephisto is also a German national hero. It's just something we mustn't tell people."

Höfgen's political principles in life are presented like his acting roles in the theatre – something that he pretends in front of an audience. Early on in the film he expresses communist allegiance against the Nazis in a scene where he appears onstage at the communist Workers Theatre: "Forget State Theater and fame. I am your comrade Hendrik Höfgen". Likewise, in an earlier scene in Hamburg when his company is in rehearsal together

²⁴ As Case reports in regards to Mnouchkine's *Mephisto*, Mirabelle Ordinaire notes that in Szabó's film, the two excerpts from *Faust* performed upon the stage, reflect in their stage design the aesthetic sensibilities of the two periods they are performed in – Weimar Germany, followed by Fascist Germany (166).

on the stage discussing a set design, Höfgen walks down to where the audience would be and proclaims to the company about how he will transform the theatre:

An end to passive watching, actors and public isolated from each other. The public must play an active part. The days of the peepshow are over. The actor is only one element of the performance... not its focal point. The hall, lights, walls, movements, sounds, all must blend into a whole. Only then shall we have real theater. The workers need Total Theater. One that shocks and arouses!

The filming of this scene emphasises the way that Höfgen delivers this explanation with the same energy and passion that he acts Mephisto on the stage. The question is what is motivating him, his political and artistic convictions or a desire to be recognised and successful in this mode of theatre. Total Theatre was a term developed by the avant-garde and used by left-wing artists who shared the desire for revolution in and through the theatre. Total Theatre in this context has the opposite function to Hitler's use of "Gesamtkunstwerk" in the political life of fascism, but also could be seen as mirroring the fascist use of theatre.

This scene stands in comparison to a later scene when Höfgen is manager of the Berlin Staatstheater giving a speech to his patrons when explaining the reasons for staging a new production of *Hamlet*. This speech contains many similarities to his earlier one:

The Prince of Denmark renounces rank, youth and love. He is the savior of the North. The lonely knight with lofty ideals, the ideal of purity of blood and race. Hamlet is a complex character, too. A great and simple man. Despite repeating myself so soon: He is a man of the North. He kills. And in his self-destructing battle he shows us the way to the future. He commands us to lead a pure life. That is his bequest to us today. . . . Hamlet is the tragic conflict between action and inaction. Between hesitating, thinking and doing. And we, the bearers of German culture know what to make of that. Hamlet is a populist drama. Neither religious, aristocratic, nor bourgeois but a work like the Greek tragedies. So we'll abolish the barrier between audience and actor. Space, light, movements, sounds are everything and even the spectators merge into one great, common effect. We must bring about Total Theater. A theater that shocks and mobilizes.

Here he again uses the term Total Theatre, but instead of using it to describe the principles of the avant-garde theatre that "shocks and arouses", he now uses the term to refer to a Total Work of Art that "shocks and mobilizes" like the theatrical spectacles the fascists were performing in everyday life.²⁵ Höfgen's appearance as theatre manager now appears like an acting role "expressed by the glasses he suddenly begins wearing – a new prop for a new

²⁵ Ordinaire notes that Szabó modeled this speech on Goebbels' official directives to theatre directors: "German art of the next decade will be heroic, steely romantic, factual without sentimentality, and mindful of its communal duty, or it won't exist" (Goebbels qtd. in Ordinaire 173).

part” (Insdorf 161). The applause that follows Höfgen’s speech about the new State Theatre production of *Hamlet* fades into applause from the end of the first performance of this production with a shot of Höfgen in the lead role coming out for bows, making a special bow to Hermann and Emmy Göring in their box. Höfgen’s acting as manager in everyday life is therefore juxtaposed with and even replaces his acting in the theatre - his speech as manager standing in for the acting of a monologue he would have just performed as Hamlet.²⁶

Höfgen’s defence of his collaboration with the Nazis is that through remaining in Germany he can help save some Jews or communist friends. His attempts to save his friend Otto Ulrich however are ultimately futile. His other defence, that art has nothing to do with politics, is contradicted by his speech as manager where the principles of fascism are integrated into his explanation of *Hamlet* and where ‘acting’ is shown to take place in life. The film reiterates the impossibility of the notion that art can exist outside of its social context.

In the last scene in the film Höfgen is confronted with the consequences of his inability to separate his artistic and political lives. The evening is the lavish occasion of the prime minister’s forty-third birthday in the foyer of the opera house.²⁷ Höfgen presents a speech thanking the prime minister for his patronage of the theatre – again this is presented as if he might be acting on the stage. Szabó adds an addition to these events which is not in the novel where after Höfgen’s speech the prime minister takes him away in his car to show him a newly built arena (presumably the Olympic stadium). They stand at the top of the stadium and look down into it and the prime minister says to Höfgen:

Well Mephisto, what power is looking down on you here. Do you feel it? This is theater! Look at this arena. It's almost ready. Wonderful, isn't it? This is where I'd stage a performance. Don't blink Hendrik, look history in the eye. What an echo. HENRICK HÖFGEN [echo]. We shall rule Europe and the world. A thousand year empire. HENRICK HÖFGEN [echo]. Go! Get going! Into the middle! Well, how do you enjoy this limelight? This is the real light, isn't it?

The Olympic stadium represents the triumph of the Nazis’ desire to enact the spectacle of “Gesamtkunstwerk” in life. Höfgen is forced by the prime minister to walk down into the dark bowels of the arena (a descent into hell) followed by the glare of the enormous

²⁶ Hamlet is also the role that Lubitsch explores in *To Be or Not to Be*.

²⁷ In Mann’s novel this episode takes place in the prologue and a guest to the event makes the correlation between Höfgen’s acting career in the theatre and his career as a Nazi collaborator when she whispers to her companion: “When he finishes I must go over and shake his hand. Isn’t it fantastic? I know him from way back. We got our first parts together in Hamburg. Those were *wonderful* times. What a career he’s made for himself since then!” (K. Mann, *Mephisto* 18).

spotlights that track him and blind him. For Höfgen acting in the theatre has become totally fused with and replaced by ‘acting’ a role in the theatricality of fascist reality. While the prime minister starts out by calling him by his stage name, Mephisto, now it is his real name, Hendrik Höfgen, that he bellows around the stadium. This is Höfgen’s moment of realization that in acting and pretending to be a Nazi (devil) in life, he has actually become one. He realises that the separation that he insisted upon between his acting in the theatre and his life is not possible in Nazi Germany. In the first scene of the film he was desperate to be the one in the spotlight - now he is desperate to be out of it, unsuccessfully trying to run away from the beams that track him across the arena. Caught in the spotlight’s glare Höfgen whispers his final lines into the camera, addressing the spectator: “What do they want of me, I’m only an actor.”²⁸ But this is the point: by only being an actor he has betrayed his country and himself.²⁹ Acting is experienced by Höfgen at the end of Szabò’s film as something that has turned from play into reality. He is faced with the ethical consequences of his aesthetic existence.

Faust Chroma (2008) Werner Fritsch (dir. Peter Falkenberg)

The dilemma that Höfgen is faced with at the end of Szabò’s film is the starting point for *Faust Chroma*, an adaptation and translation of Werner Fritsch’s original text *Colour Instruction for Chameleons*. Fritsch was inspired by Mann and Szabò’s use of Gründgens (this time without the pseudonym Höfgen) as a central protagonist and the representation of his symbolic pact with the devil (Nazis). *Colour Instruction for Chameleons* was first performed during Expo 2000 at the Staatstheater Darmstadt: “Fritsch himself admits that his primary intention in CHROMA was not to write a play about the life of Gustaf Gründgens. Rather, the question which impelled him was, ‘Was erzähle ich der Welt auf der Expo über Deutschland? [What do I tell to the world at the Expo about Germany]’ (Crowe, “ ‘Der Tod Schneidet Den Film Des Lebens’: Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch” 163).³⁰ In Fritsch’s text, Gründgens is represented at the end of his life in 1963 after having made the

²⁸ This corresponds to the last lines in Mann’s novel: “All I am is a perfectly ordinary actor...” (263).

²⁹ A recent film whose plot follows a similar trajectory to *Mephisto* is *Rise and Fall* (2010) directed by Oskar Roehler, a biopic about the real life German actor Ferdinand Marian, who starred in the Nazi anti-semitic propaganda film *Jud Süß* (1940). However this film doesn’t explore a refusal of acting.

³⁰ A year earlier playwright Volker Kuhn also wrote a play about Gründgens called *G wie Gustav* (1999) (von Lindeiner-Stráský 163).

decision to refuse acting and start living, embarking on a world trip starting in Manila where he dies in a hotel of a morphine overdose in a suspected suicide:

Gründgens: I am a mirror
without image
An echo without origin.
My roles assault me.
I age, I age in clinics,
so that I can blossom in roles...
I want to travel.
Around the world: Egypt, China, Manila...
not Don Juan, but San Juan
No more theatre.
My blood pulses stronger in Hamlet,
stronger in Mephisto, than in me!³¹

Fritsch also took from Mann and Szabò the theatrical analogy of Gründgens as a Faust figure, although he goes beyond simply hinting at his Faustian position and explores it in more depth. Fritsch uses Gründgens' real life suicide to symbolise the fictional Gründgens' Faustian descent into "hell" - the final settlement of his wager with the devil over his soul, around which the play is structured. Sinéad Crowe describes the way Fritsch created the play as "the 'film' which might have played in Gründgens' unconscious as he lay dying" (" 'Der Tod Schneidet Den Film Des Lebens': Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch" 402). She also describes Fritsch's intention to have the audience reflect upon their own lives in the same way during the performance: "[T]he often enigmatic language of his drama generates a cinematic *response*, in that it prompts each spectator to create in the mind's eye ('im Kino seines Kopfes'), to use his cinematic metaphor - his or her own personal 'film' " (405). In the throes of his 'last film' and the hallucinations from the morphine overdose that leads to his death, Gründgens is visited by people and events from his life in Nazi Germany but also by scenes and characters from Goethe's *Faust*.

Fritsch writes plays based on the lives of real people. Crowe describes Hans-Thies Lehmann's view that the monologue or monodrama form heightens an audience's feeling that they are experiencing something that might have really happened: "[O]ne major attraction of the form lies in its propensity to blur the boundaries between theatre and reality. . . . [T]he monologue form tends to defictionalise the character, thus implicating the audience in his/her situation" (411). In his early works, Fritsch utilised a method he termed "Tonbandrealismus" (tape-realism) where he tape recorded the everyday speech of the people he was dramatizing,

³¹ All quotes from *Faust Chroma* are translated and adapted by Peter Falkenberg from the original text by Werner Fritsch (unpublished).

often people he knew personally, as a starting point for his theatrical monologues. He is clear to point out however that this was not in an attempt to create documentary realism on the stage but an attempt to capture something authentic (Fritsch 231). He abandoned this technique in his later plays, which were based on well-known people no longer alive, but he continued to collect recordings of their speech as inspiration for his monologues. In *Colour Instruction for Chameleons* Fritsch used as material speeches, lectures and interviews that the real life Gründgens had given up until his death.

For example, on his fiftieth birthday in 1949, Gründgens discussed the way he had become identified with his roles playing villains:

I love fervently all the roles I play! Wait a minute, hmm, well, ok, yes, I have had unhappy loves. They are... the unhappy loves are the typical Gründgens-roles - I hate them. These are the roles which falsify my image. Roles that I can also play. I always played Marinelli in *Emilia Galotti* instead of the prince. I always played the roles that were apparently easy to read from my appearance and never came from my heart. Never. In the beginning I mean! And film is maybe to blame, that I, well, you know that I used to be a typical film Schurke [villain]. And that sticks. Also my first role in Berlin in Bruckner's *Felons* was a role that I really hated, but had to play simply to survive, right? But it did not project anything about me. It projected an image of me and I am sometimes quite amazed at how poorly the image that people have of me fits with the image that I have of myself. (Green 31)

Here Gründgens discusses a fusion of his acting roles with his own identity. His desire to point out that he played the role of a villain “simply to survive” shows his anxiety not only over being type cast as a villain in the theatre, but about being considered as a villain in his everyday life. It is clear that he considers his identity to be on the contrary that of a good person: “I want to be regarded as someone who preserved and nourished the flame in a dark period” (Gründgens qtd. in Steinberg). The way he attempted to maintain the image of himself as a good person is also evident in a speech to his actors in 1955:

When, like me, a person has appeared in the foremost of theatre for 30 years, one is inevitably subjected to [the] creation of a kind of legend, a legend which more and more loses any connection to oneself, especially, when, as in my case, this creation of a legend was defined and controlled from the outside during a critical phase of my life. I imagine sometimes that if I were to meet my myth on the street I would not recognize myself. And this constant balancing act between myth and reality eats up a lot of energy. (Green 82)

When Gründgens speaks of his “legend”, “image” or “myth” created during a “critical phase” of his life, he is referring to the perception people have of him as a result of his collaboration with the Nazis. He discusses this perception others have of him as he might a person he meets on the street or an acting role he plays in the theatre – as something detached from and at

odds with his real identity. Both Szabò and Fritsch are interested in how this ‘other person’ might actually have been the ‘real’ Gründgens that he now completely disavows. Like Szabò, Fritsch represents this problem in the incarnation within Gründgens of the symbiotic and mirrored relationship between the Faust and Mephisto roles.

In order to defend and justify his collaboration with the Nazis, the real life Gründgens maintained that art should be totally separate from political life and that he had a duty to remain in Germany to continue its proud artistic tradition. In an interview with Günter Gaus in 1963, a few months before he left for Manila, Gründgens spoke of living vicariously through acting during Nazi Germany: “The uncertainty in which we all lived made the stage appear to be the only certain factor” (qtd. in Green 40). This may have been a response to what he experienced as the falseness and unreality of fascism. Green paraphrases comments from this interview:

After a few questions, Gründgens adjusted his pose, so that he was no longer looking directly into the camera. The cameras readjusted accordingly, so that Gründgens continued the interview in profile³². . . . Gründgens continued to answer Gaus’s questions in a defensive manner, repeating statements he used during his denazification. Gründgens said that he could not look back on this period with a clear head, because it did not even seem real to him at the time. Since he could not see the truth of his life in the Third Reich from the inside, the attempts of others to do so from the outside were even more divorced from reality. Because his legend was largely determined from the outside, during this critical point in his life, it is in no way representative of what actually happened. (88)

In the way that he attempted in this interview to distance himself from his life during fascism, Gründgens insisted on seeing his collaboration with the Nazis as an acting job, something he pretended in order to achieve certain aims but not something he believed in or endorsed (in other words in order that his ethical self would remain untainted). And yet as this ‘acting’ occurred in everyday life and not in the theatre, it contained real actions and had real consequences. This ‘acting’ in everyday life was not a role he could shed so easily as the roles he played on the stage, and its consequences never left him. By attempting to separate his acting in the theatre from his political life he denied the efficacy the theatre had in supporting the Nazi regime. In doing so he also denied (what he had earlier endorsed during his participation in revolutionary theatre) the possibility that theatre could have functioned instead to engage in and oppose the “uncertain” conditions of life outside of it. The real

³² Green notes that Gründgens favoured the profile pose in his professional photographs and cites an early example on the back of which was written: “To hold onto until I’m famous. With my profile in the Greek manner: a gift from nature” (Green 13).

legacy his acting has left behind is something that Gründgens appeared unable to come to terms with or to acknowledge.

However, in another interview at the end of his life Gründgens exhibited a glimmer of recognition when he contradicted earlier statements by speaking of his interest in acting villains: “As an actor, I am interested in characters who, in the revolt against their destiny, in the dispute with a higher power, with God if you will, perform evil or are broken by a guilty conscience like Macbeth” (qtd. in Green 84). Green also reports that in this last year of his life, in a document “Wie Man Lebt,” Gründgens showed a desire to refuse his lying and pretending when he wrote that he had never really enjoyed his life or been present and was determined to discover “how one lives” (89). This particular line is taken up by Fritsch in his play where he represents Gründgens’ refusal of acting as a reaction to his realization that his whole life has been based on acting and pretending. Fritsch’s title *Colour Instruction for Chameleons* (*Chroma: Farbenlehre für Chamäleon*) is especially meaningful in this respect. Chameleon as a term used to describe a “changeable and inconstant” person who adapts their behaviour and opinion to suit the situation, could stand in as a synonym for actor.³³ The term derives from the species of lizard called Chamaeleonidae who have evolved to be able to change colours to suit the conditions as camouflage to protect against enemies and presumably to hunt prey themselves.

The Free Theatre Christchurch production of *Faust Chroma* included new additions to Fritsch’s text, beginning with the first scene, where the opening credits of the 1960 film version of Goethe’s *Faust*, directed by Peter Gorski, were projected onto a screen of mosquito netting while the orchestral soundtrack from the film was played. In this way the theatre was transformed into a cinema, setting up the theatrical experience as a ‘last film’. The inter-titles established that it was a film of *Faust* starring Gründgens in the role of Mephisto and Will Quadflieg in the role of Faust. This established Gründgens as an actor in the role of Mephisto for New Zealand audiences who were less familiar with both the Faust drama and Gründgens’ theatrical legacy. Behind this projected image two live actors appeared and the audience watched them through the transparent screen ‘karaoke’ (imitate) the movements and dialogue (translated from the original German into English) of the on-screen Faust (Quadflieg) and Mephisto (Gründgens) from what was revealed to be the pact scene in Goethe’s play. The live actors were costumed to resemble their onscreen counterparts.

³³ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Chameleon>

At the end of this 'karaoke' scene, the film image disappeared and the live actor who was doing the 'karaoke' of the onscreen Mephisto (Gründgens) parted the screen of mosquito netting which was draped around a raised platform above the stage. Below lay the prone bodies of six actors in collapsed positions. A pianist also beneath the platform and a female voice began to perform 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', Schubert's musical composition of the scene from Goethe's *Faust* where Gretchen is sitting by her spinning wheel pained by her love for Faust. As this love song progressed Mephisto brought the actors to life from above as if they were puppets on strings. They included a blonde female dressed in a dirndl (conforming to the Gretchen archetype) who was also revealed to be the female singing the Gretchen song, a man dressed as a Nazi officer, and several actors dressed in 1930s clothing. At the end of the song these actor 'puppets' collapsed back down, Mephisto disappeared behind the mosquito screen and another scene from the filmed version of *Faust* directed by Gorski was projected onto it; this time the Forest and Cavern scene where Faust is tortured by his desire for Gretchen. This time however, the live actors swapped the roles they were doing the karaoke of, so that the live actor dressed as Mephisto began doing a karaoke of the onscreen Faust and the live actor resembling Faust began doing a karaoke of the onscreen Mephisto (Gründgens).³⁴ This opening sequence presented the idea of a theatrical world with the playing of roles within it, and the symbiotic swapping of the Mephisto role with the Faust role.³⁵ The devil Mephisto was established as a puppet player - a position from which he manipulated emotions and desires.

At this point in *Faust Chroma*, the live actor who resembled Faust (who had just finished doing the karaoke of the onscreen Mephisto), began a monologue by coughing, shivering and appearing to be in death throes. It soon became clear he was hallucinating on morphine. His hallucinations began with the sea that he 'sees' and their location in Manila provided exotic and erotic imagery. As his hallucinations dissipated he was visited by the live actor dressed as Mephisto who karoked the film next to him, along with a second actor dressed as Mephisto. To cast two actors in the part of Mephisto in the production was an addition of Falkenberg's, as was to have them both played by female actors, referring to the

³⁴ For a link to footage from the first scene of *Faust Chroma* see: <http://www.freetheatre.org.nz/faust-chroma.html>.

³⁵ This addition to Fritsch's play in its incarnation in *Faust Chroma* establishes the role swapping that Fritsch explores in later scenes when Gründgens is positioned as Faust next to the actor dressed as Emmy (before her marriage to Hermann Göring) who wears the costume of Gretchen. Together they act out a love scene from Goethe's play. Gründgens is in the Faustian position in another scene when he has a conversation based on his experience with his second wife Marianne Hoppe with the actress playing the Gretchen role. **Gründgens:** "Life-theatre! Theatre-life! Banalities that kill me."

historical association in our culture of the devil with a woman who represents (sexual) desire.³⁶ The two Mephistos then had a dialogue with the live actor which revealed that he was Gründgens, the central protagonist, and that they were his former role of Mephisto come back to taunt him. It made clear the irony that while Gründgens (in real life and in his representation in *Faust Chroma*) acted as Mephisto in the theatre and later in film, he was positioned in the role of Faust awaiting hell:

Mephisto 2: You will go to the grave as everyman, as Faust.

Gründgens: But my defining role was Mephisto.

Mephisto 1: Have I ever disappointed us?

Gründgens: I created you, not you, me.

Mephisto 2: Why do you have no face – without a mask?

Gründgens: And why do people believe that I was you.

Gründgens remained elevated above the stage on his sleeping platform for the entire performance surrounded by the transparent mosquito net used for the film projections. As established in the first scene, this represented the way film image and live performance, actor and role, past and present, competed for equal status. In the next scene, the two Mephistos went down below to the ‘puppet’ world and brought the ‘puppet’ actors to life again. Film was at the same time again projected, this time footage from Fritsch’s film *Faust Sonnengesang*, with an upside down image of yet another actor dressed as Mephisto, lying in the breakers of the ocean.³⁷ This image was layered over the live actor playing Gründgens as his hallucinatory monologue continued. These film images of an actor playing Mephisto, represented Gründgens’ flashbacks and hallucinations of himself in the role of Mephisto. His former role appeared in this sequence as an independent being who was also experiencing a similar state of near death reflection or hallucination.³⁸

As the ‘puppet’ actors below came more and more to life Mephisto 2 announced: “Remember the party with Klaus and Erika Mann?” The two Mephistos then drew back the mosquito screen and revealed to Gründgens this episode from his life, acted out by the ‘puppet’ actors below him. These ‘puppet’ actors played the roles of Gründgens’ real life friends and colleagues Klaus and Erika Mann along with other actors and friends in the theatre. They indulged in an intoxicating and wild party which Gründgens looked down upon

³⁶ Grotowski produced a production of *Dr Faustus* in 1963 where Mephistopheles was played by both a man and a woman (Grotowski 71).

³⁷ Footage from this production of *Faust Chroma* in turn became a part of Fritsch’s finished film when it premiered in 2009.

³⁸ In 2005 Anders Paulin directed a theatrical adaptation of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* in Berlin that incorporated projection of film footage from an interview with Gründgens before his death. In this production the acting of roles was similarly played with where the actor playing Höfgen “plays multiple roles: Höfgen, Gründgens, himself, and traits of Brandauer’s performance as Mephisto” (Green 103-4).

and occasionally interacted with, which involved the acting out of scenes, dancing, singing, cross-dressing and drugs. They danced until they dropped. Mephisto 1 then entered dressed as an SS officer, clearly equating the devil with the Nazis. He (played by a she) revived the revelers momentarily with snorts of cocaine, and joined by Mephisto 2, shot them all dead with machine guns before waking Gründgens up to show him the carnage.

The theatrical form adopted by Falkenberg of humans as puppets (beginning in the first sequence of the performance) worked in this scene to suggest that the Nazis (via their association with the devil Mephisto) were the ones pulling the strings over the population during fascism and taking the position of the devil as director (in a *theatrum mundi* sense). In other scenes, these same ‘puppet’ actors also played the roles of Nazis such as Hermann Göring, Emmy Göring and Hitler in scenes from Gründgens’ past conjured by the two Mephistos. It showed the Nazis as puppets themselves and this had similarities to Elsaesser’s interpretation of the representation of Hitler in Syberberg’s film.³⁹ In an early scene in *Faust Chroma*, the ‘puppet’ actor playing Hermann Göring appeared and quoted Gründgens an excerpt from Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* (1882):

Hermann Göring: (reads) falseness with a good conscience; the delight in simulation exploding as a power that pushes aside one’s so-called ‘character,’ flooding it and at times extinguishing it; the inner craving for a role and mask, for *appearance*; an oversupply of adaptability.

Gründgens: Good, good.

Hermann Göring: And because it is good, I read on: Such an instinct will have developed most easily in families of the lower classes who had to survive under changing pressures and coercions, in deep dependency, who had to cut their coat according to the cloth, always adapting themselves again to new circumstances, who always had to change their mien and posture, until they learned gradually to turn their coat with *every* wind and thus virtually to *become* a coat – and masters of the incorporated and ingrained art of eternally playing hide-n-seek, which in the case of animals is called mimicry – until eventually this capacity, accumulated from generation to generation, becomes domineering, unreasonable, and intractable, an instinct that learns to lord it over other instincts and generates the actor, the “artist”.

Nietzsche’s aphorism defined acting as something false and disreputable and the character of Göring used it here in *Faust Chroma* to put down Gründgens as an “actor”. When reflecting back on her life with Gründgens, the real life Erika Mann also evoked Nietzsche’s aphorism when she writes of the real life Gründgens’ anti-fascist convictions in life, as something acted and ‘put on’ like a coat:

³⁹ The theatrical form of puppets is mentioned by Mann in his novel, when he describes German citizens on the occasion of Göring’s 43rd birthday celebration: “They move like marionettes” (4).

As I have already repeatedly noted, our Gustaf acted 100 percent as a Communist, an attitude that hardly bothered me personally (although mine was diametrically opposed to it). But I dismissed it as insincere, snobby, and quasi-opportunistic, and it significantly contributed to my desire for divorce. That Gründgens was not ‘politically’ a Nazi, nobody will contest. But the fact that he was always apolitical, and namely that he ‘wore’ what was currently chic and useful – that is important. (Green 27-28)⁴⁰

In the scene in *Faust Chroma* however, Gründgens reversed the put down by parodying Göring as a (ham) actor:

Gründgens: And do you know which role I am just learning?

Hermann Göring: Certainly.

Gründgens: (as if he was Göring)

He who wants to get ahead fast should avoid the good and look for the bad!

The good – ha! – are self-satisfied, like sloths

They have their God, and their big gobs

“Let me have men about me that are fat...”

That, only a Caesar can say

But not a führer of our day

“Let me have about me crafty scoundrels...”

The passage the character of Gründgens quoted here in *Faust Chroma* closely paraphrased a speech that the real life Hermann Göring made to a Nuremberg defence lawyer during his trial after the war in which he (mis)quoted Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar with the phrase otherwise translated as: “Let me have men about me that are utter villains” (Fest). Hermann Göring was candid about the necessity for liars and deceivers within a functioning fascist state. In this way the real life Gründgens was Hermann Göring’s perfect accomplice, capable of playing a villain in theatre and in life. In this passage from Fritsch’s play the theatricalisation of fascist behaviour was set in parallel to acting on the stage. This was also the case in a conversation with actress Emmy Göring when the ‘puppet’ actor Hitler scorned actors in the theatre, preferring ‘real’ artists:

Hitler: Everything today in the theatre has no connection to Eternity. It is banal. A real artist doesn’t need to shout HEIL HEIL before every performance and then play in an awful way. No, no, no. A real artist will always come to us, because we are the creators of a new and always-varied national socialist realism. Appearance and reality, my dear Emmy, you must never mistake them.

Ham acting and realism become the same in a national socialist aesthetic.

⁴⁰ When Szabó talked in an interview about the character Höfgen (based on Gründgens) he echoed Nietzsche when he explained that “to make oneself adaptable by the second to manoeuvre to find out the latest direction to turn in, to externally examine which way the wind blows – this is a dangerous thing” (Zsugán).

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche warns against such a time when acting and living would become inseparable, a tendency he felt was emerging in his own period, comparing it to the end period of the Ancient Greeks where,

They really became actors. As such they enchanted and overcame all the world. . . . But what I fear, what is so palpable that today one could grasp it with one's hands, if one felt like grasping it, is that we modern men are even now pretty far along on the same road; and whenever a human being begins to discover how he is playing a role and how he can be an actor, he becomes an actor.... It is thus that the maddest and most interesting ages of history always emerge, when the 'actors,' all kinds of actors, become the real masters. (303)

In another passage from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche notes that when acting occurs in life, while it is false, it actually usurps and stands in place of reality:

[A]lmost all Europeans confound themselves with their role; they become the victims of their own 'good performance'; they themselves have forgotten how much accidents, moods, and caprice disposed of them when the question of their 'vocation' was decided – and how many other roles they might perhaps have been able to play; for now it is too late. Considered more deeply, the role has actually become character; and art, nature. (302)

He goes on: "The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and can manage almost any role, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art" (303).

Nietzsche's warning prophecy anticipated exactly the concerns a few decades later of Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and Brecht amongst many others, during fascism. Yet even Nietzsche perhaps didn't anticipate the tawdry way and the extent to which his prophecy would be confirmed.

While Nietzsche didn't believe in God, he continued the tradition of the Christian anti-theatricalists such as Tertullian and Augustine, in his belief that acting replaces truth. *The Gay Science* is the work where Nietzsche's aversion to acting is most strongly expressed: "What is the drama to me? What, the convulsions of its moral ecstasies which give the common people satisfaction? What, the whole gesture hocus-pocus of the actor? You will guess that I am essentially anti-theatrical" (325). Walter Kaufmann notes, that in a later essay, "Nietzsche contra Wagner," Nietzsche included a revised version of this passage adding: "Confronted with the theatre, this mass art par excellence, I feel that profound scorn at the bottom of my soul which every artist today feels. *Success* in the theater – with that one drops in my respect forever; *failure* – I prick up my ears and begin to respect" (*The Gay Science* 325). In his work a year before *The Gay Science*, *The Dawn of Day (Morgenröte: Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile*, 1881), Nietzsche describes the actor as "nothing

but an ideal ape – so much of an ape is he, indeed, that he is not capable of believing in the ‘essence’ or in the ‘essential’: everything becomes for him merely performance, intonation, attitude, stage, scenery, and public” (275). In “Schopenhauer as Educator” he describes his society as a “lying puppet-show, in which man has forgot himself” (“Schopenhauer as Educator”). In *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887), he makes it clear that the actor has no ability to communicate truth:

Homer would not have created an Achilles, nor Goethe a Faust, if Homer had been an Achilles or if Goethe had been a Faust. A complete and perfect artist is to all eternity separated from the ‘real,’ from the actual; on the other hand, it will be appreciated that he can at times get tired to the point of despair of this eternal ‘unreality’ and falseness of his innermost being – and that he then sometimes attempts to trespass on to the most forbidden ground, on reality, and attempts to have real existence. With what success? The success will be guessed – it is the typical velleity⁴¹ of the artist. (126-7)

Nietzsche singled out Jews and women as exemplars of the acting he saw in society. His views on Jews in particular appear to have led to his writing being adopted selectively by the fascists to support their ideology. For example, Nietzsche wrote of Jews: “As regards the *Jews*, the people who possess the art of adaptability par excellence, this train of thought suggests immediately that one might see them virtually as a world-historical arrangement for the production of actors, a veritable breeding ground for actors. And it really is high time to ask: What good actor today is *not* – a Jew?” (*The Gay Science* 317).

In his autobiography *Mein Kampf*, Hitler echoes Nietzsche when he describes Jews’ gravitation towards the “art which seems to require least original invention, the art of acting. But even here, in reality, he is only a ‘ juggler,’ or rather an ape... a superficial imitator” (Hitler 303). While Hitler echoes Nietzsche’s scorn for Jews and acting (as well as his early praise of Wagner’s “Gesamtkunstwerk”), theatricality became for Hitler, fundamental to the creation of the Reich and to himself as Leader of it. The theatricality of fascism exhibited exactly the kind of acting and pretending that Nietzsche despised. As Nietzsche notes: “Must not anyone who wants to move the crowd be an actor who impersonates himself? Must he not first translate himself into grotesque obviousness and then present his whole person and cause in this coarsened and simplified version?” (*The Gay Science* 213).

⁴¹ The definition of “velleity” is, “a wish or inclination not strong enough to lead to action” (<http://oxforddictionaries.com>).

At one point in *Faust Chroma*, in a flashback to a speech he made to his actors in Nazi Germany, the character of Gründgens advocated for a theatre that would pursue truth in a Nietzschean sense by actively refusing fascism:⁴²

Gründgens: We live in a time of the re-evaluation of all values, including that of the theatre. In such times of political and economic uncertainty, when we are a part of a struggle between two starkly opposed ideological factions, of what worth is the theatre? When we are trying to resist the overwhelming influence of people who belittle our worth and force us to live in a society we find oppressive and inhuman, why spend so much time and energy pretending? The answer: through our pretending, we must discover truth, or it is all just show-pony shit. Art must help us to confront the unpleasant truths of our society and of ourselves. . . . Evening after evening we choose to struggle with the audience, to show them things they may not wish to see, tell them things they may not wish to hear. They implore: just enrapture us! And we say no. We must say no. We will not prostitute ourselves for their love and admiration. We will sacrifice ourselves for their benefit! We must make the most of each precious moment with each audience. We must not waste time with frivolity. No cheap acting, no gimmicks, no asides to the audience, but truth, from the heart, truth...

In this speech, while never mentioning by name the opposing “ideological factions” he spoke of, the character of Gründgens (and it would appear, his real life counterpart) advocated for a theatre of resistance that would refuse the oppressive regime of fascism. In declaring this theatre a vehicle for “truth” that refuses to enrapture a (fascist) audience but instead tells them “things they might not want to hear”, the character of Gründgens may have espoused the attitude of Fritsch himself, as evident in this statement:

The theatre of now is a place where the theatre that we play for ourselves and for others does not occur again. The fact that in the present theatre only that theatre is played that we play for ourselves and for others anyway or that theatre that the film plays for us as if it was life (Aristotle is only too well preserved in Hollywood) and the media as reality and the state as democracy, all that degrades the theatre to a tautology.⁴³

While the revolutionary language in Gründgens’ speech in *Faust Chroma* appeared to promote communist values (much like Höfgen’s speech advocating for Total Theatre in Szabó’s film), it can also be read as the very same revolutionary rhetoric used by the

⁴² Surhkamp published Gründgens’ theatre speeches, on which these monologues in Fritsch’s play are based, in *Reality of Theater (Wirklichkeit des Theaters)* (Green 80).

⁴³ Fritsch qtd. in Crowe, “‘Der Tod Schneidet Den Film Des Lebens’: Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch” (413-14). Trans. Peter Falkenberg. In a restaging of Mnouchkine’s *Mephisto* directed by Tim Robbins for The Actor’s Gang in LA in 2001, Robbins also replaced the Nazis with Hollywood moguls as the devils/actors, as Case reports: “Robbins associated Höfgen’s attraction to the money and glamour of the Nazi theatre with his own attraction to the rewards of Hollywood filmdom” (Case, “Mephisto (Review)” 299). This mirrors my analysis of Brandauer’s seduction into playing villains (devils) in Hollywood after the success of his role in Szabó’s *Mephisto*. See this footnote in this chapter pp. 29.

fascists.⁴⁴ Perhaps Gründgens (in Fritsch's representation and in life) was seduced by playing the 'part' of the revolutionary and socialist or national socialist made no difference?

Near the end of *Faust Chroma*, Gründgens gave a second speech to his actors, this time after the war was over and when Nazi Germany was defeated:

Gründgens: My best-loved actors. Heaven is with us again! Through these dark times, we have done the only right thing! To remain in Germany and maintain a theatre that tried to keep alive the spirit of our classic dramatists was the only right thing to do in the hope for a brighter future.

Here the character of Gründgens celebrated his preservation of a theatre that upheld the "spirit" of German playwrights such as Goethe. This was a deviation from his earlier intention for the theatre to refuse the lies of fascism. Crowe writes: "As it reflects on the various roles which theatre can play in society, CHROMA attacks the conservative, escapist theatre Gründgens practiced, and condemns the way such forms of theatre shirk any social or political responsibility" (407).

In *Faust Chroma*, Gründgens' actors and former friends gave speeches in response. The character of Klaus Mann laments the way Gründgens is erasing his complicity in fascism: "You are in the process of being successful again in the land of forgiving and forgetting." The character of Klaus Mann believes suicide is the only action left open for artists to respond and draw attention to the lying and falsification of history that has become a part of German culture:

Klaus Mann: I don't want to perform anymore. I don't want to lie anymore. I am fed up with all disguises and contrivances. Whom should I try to please or impress? I am alone. I am free. Let us cleanse the reputation of German culture by committing suicide together. We have reached a point where only the most dramatic, the most extreme gesture has the slightest chance of being noticed and waking the people from their lethargy.

Gründgens: Suicide. Never in my life.

Klaus Mann: You stayed in this country and have the blood of many on your hands.

Gründgens: I have saved hundreds. Jewish actors. Jewish wives. Even communists. They testified.

Erika Mann: Another fine performance Gustaf. Gustaf the hero. The noble Jew saviour. The chameleon changes his colours yet again to save his skin. Klaus the dreamer, the poet, never far from the pen, was never a chameleon.⁴⁵

In this exchange, Fritsch shows Klaus Mann's recognition that the falseness of life in Germany after the war, exemplified in the "chameleon" Gründgens, had permeated his own

⁴⁴ In *Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars*, Juan A. Suárez suggests that "Fascism is perhaps the outer limit of the avant-garde: the avant-garde institutionalized as state form" (273).

⁴⁵ Erika's line here contains the genesis of the title of Fritsch's play - *Colour Instruction for Chameleons*.

life as well.⁴⁶ Mann is represented equating performing as an artist or an actor with the “performance” expected from him in life. His desire for suicide as a refusal of this ‘acting’ life, prefigures the last scene in *Faust Chroma*, where Gründgens descends into the final stage of his feverish delirium - the morphine monologue that ends in his own death (suicide).⁴⁷ Over the course of the play Gründgens is shown the extent to which acting and living became inseparable in his life during fascism. His refusal of acting must therefore end in his death.

Crowe likens Fritsch’s aims for the performance of his play to having an Artaudian function by exposing and stripping away the acting mask from Gründgens’ life for the benefit of an audience, “attack[ing] a nation which has not confronted its past and for whose self-deception Gustaf is depicted as the perfect emblem. Fritsch’s theatre aims to put an end to this self-deception” (“‘Der Tod Schneidet Den Film Des Lebens’: Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch” 414).⁴⁸ Fritsch can also be seen to display Nietzschean intentions, despite the irony that he uses acting in the theatre to do it, when he “champions a theatre which, paradoxically, is the one place where pretense ceases and the mask is dropped” (413). This aim for the performance as a whole can be seen to culminate in the final moments of Gründgens’ dying morphine monologue. In this scene from *Faust Chroma*, film footage was projected (again from *Faust Sonnengesang*) that Fritsch obtained on his own pilgrimage to Manila, of the Good Friday crucifixions where Filipino Catholics re-enact Christ’s

⁴⁶ The suicide of the real life Klaus Mann after the end of the war in 1949, was connected as I described earlier, to the disillusionment he felt upon return to his native Germany and the refused publication of his novel. Many other artists and writers who opposed fascism committed suicide before and during the war eg. Walter Benjamin, in 1940, when he was unable to escape to America. Others who committed suicide include Kurt Tucholsky, Stefan Zweig, Ernst Weiß and Walter Hasenclever (Steinberg). Fritsch based this passage on Mann’s last essay, “Europe’s Search for a New Credo” (“Die Heimsuchung des europäischen Geistes” 1949) in which he quotes a young student of philosophy and literature he met in Sweden:

[T]he movement of despair, the rebellion of the hopeless ones. Instead of trying to appease the powers that be, instead of vindicating the machinations of greedy bankers or the outrages of tyrannical bureaucrats, we ought to go on record with our protest, with an unequivocal expression of our bitterness, our horror. Things have reached a point where only the most dramatic, most radical gesture has a chance to be noticed, to awake the conscience of the blinded hypnotized masses. I’d like to see hundreds, thousands of intellectuals follow the examples of Virginia Woolf, Ernst Toller, Stefan Zweig, Jan Masaryk. A suicide wave among the world’s most distinguished minds would shock the peoples out of the lethargy, would make them realize the extreme gravity of the ordeal man has bought upon himself by his folly and selfishness. (Mann, “Europe’s Search for a New Credo”)

⁴⁷ Whether Gründgens’ death was suicide or not remains ambiguous in the play as it was in his real life. Gründgens’ real life suicide note read (in Green’s English translation): “I think I took too many sleeping pills, I feel rather strange, let me sleep in” (qtd. in Green 89-90). Although, Green notes that there is disagreement about how he phrased the final words. It was also claimed to have been, “let me sleep for a long time” (Green 90).

⁴⁸ Crowe discusses Fritsch’s use of religious ritual in *Religion in Contemporary German Drama*: “His stylization of theater as a surrogate religion echoes the manifestos of ‘holy’ theater practitioners such as Artaud and Grotowski” (103). I explore the relationship between religious ritual and theatre in Chapter Two.

crucifixion by being nailed to crosses. Fritsch describes his intention for the projection of this footage during Gründgens' dying monologue, as a refusal of acting:

The nails are really being driven into the flesh. These images, this real pain, stands in contrast to the actor who portrays pain and death. Christ is thus the greatest counterpoint to the actor, whose embodiment for us Germans of this century is the Mephisto of Gründgens.⁴⁹

In his situating of Christ (and the Filipino worshippers) in opposition to actors, Fritsch could be seen to be taking up the position of the Christian anti-theatricalists. Crowe takes issue with the dichotomy Fritsch has created in this film footage between acting and reality: "Fritsch's emphasis on the authenticity of the Filipino crucifixions neglects the fact that they, too, are a form of performance, albeit one which entails a drastic ordeal. Arguably, the Filipino flagellant is not the antithesis of the actor, but belongs to the same performance continuum" (409).

In discussing both *Colour Instruction for Chameleons* and Fritsch's previous play *The Wheel of Fortune* (*Das Rad des Glücks*), Crowe criticises his "quasi-Baroque determination to uncover the truth behind the mask which undercuts their apparently postmodern intertwining of fantasy, reality, fact, fiction, artificiality, and realism" (413). She also criticises the way in which,

the therapeutic agenda underpinning Fritsch's life-writing does not allow for any response which might not result in the edification of the spectator. Fritsch contends that the last film helps us to make sense of life by generating insights which 'Wie Blitze, die das Dunkel aufheben, in dem wir zeitlebens verhaftet waren'; [Like lightning, remove the darkness in which we were imprisoned for life]; a description which also fits the aims of his theatre. However, Fritsch's relatively rigid and somewhat moralistic understanding of the nature of these insights greatly undermines the freedom which he seeks to offer his spectators. (415)

Perhaps Fritsch's own pilgrimage to Manila to shoot his film was motivated like Gründgens', by a desire to find authenticity - in theatre and in life - where acting is refused.⁵⁰

Enigma Emmy Göring (2008) Werner Fritsch (dir. Peter Falkenberg)

⁴⁹ Fritsch qtd. in Crowe, " 'Der Tod Schneidet Den Film Des Lebens': Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch" (409). Trans. Timothy Dail.

⁵⁰ Crowe suggests that instead, Fritsch exposes his own Western prejudice. It could be that he views people of non-western ethnicity in third world countries as not being able to act and therefore much closer to 'reality' than those in the West (an early ethnographic prejudice). Crowe accuses Fritsch of exploiting Gründgens' celebrity appeal in a desire to represent the authentic.

Fritsch continued his theatrical exploration of Nazi Germany with *Enigma Emmy Göring*, based on the life of Emmy Göring, the actress and friend of Gründgens, another ‘celebrity’ of the Nazi period and a character Fritsch had already developed in *Colour Instruction for Chameleons*, and also set several decades after the period of Nazi Germany. Fritsch returns in part to the monologue form of his earlier plays by having Emmy reflect back on her life during fascism when she starred next to Gründgens in light romantic comedies, attracting the attention of Hermann Göring. She muses and elaborates on the fact that once married to Göring she refused acting in favour of becoming a wife and mother. However, as in Fritsch’s representation of Gründgens, Emmy’s refusal of acting is problematic.

As he did with Gründgens, Fritsch collected verbatim material from the real life Emmy Göring. Of central importance was her autobiography *My Life with Goering (An der Seite meines Mannes, 1967)*. In it she shows the same desire as Gründgens in his speeches and interviews, to separate her acting in the theatre from her life outside it. Emmy uses her position as a woman to further assist her: “I belonged to the theatre; that was my world and I had no reason to mix into politics. . . . [which was] something different and in my view, only suited to men” (Goering 20) and “I used to stand there [at receptions], the completely non-political former actress at the very fountain-head of history. And as I am even now more interested in people than in politics, I always tried to see the human side of those contemporary events which seemed so complicated to me, that is to observe the men who were making history” (61). In Emmy’s view the theatre was the realm of women and politics the realm of men. And acting in the theatre was precisely the way she seduced the politician Göring: “I was in fact just what he saw me as: an actress and a woman. I needed a great effort to interest myself in any political subject and I was delighted when he [Goering] preferred to talk to me about the theatre, books, paintings and human relationships” (13).

Goethe’s *Faust* features prominently in her autobiography: “During the first months of the new regime, I really heard only very distant echoes of politics. We were preparing a revival of *Faust* and in the theatre that is an event which puts everything else in the shade” (41). She does not appear to have acted in this particular production, which must have been the 1932-33 season Gründgens starred in, but she acted the role of Gretchen in *Faust* on at least one occasion during her early life as an actress. The character of Gretchen represents the absolute purity and innocence that is used and corrupted by Faust via the devil Mephisto. Gretchen is the victim of Faust’s seduction, a ‘good’ person, and this is how Emmy also considered herself. The role of Gretchen was one of Emmy’s many roles of, as she describes

it, “romantic and society women” (8). She appears to have been type cast as a ‘good woman’ just as Gründgens was type cast as a villain.

Despite Emmy’s retrospective insistence that her life as an actress and her identity as a young woman during fascism were separate, she reveals their connection throughout her autobiography. For example, she describes her first audition when she acted the role of Gretchen (Margareta): “I launched into Margareta’s prayer from *Faust*. . . . I was now nothing but Margareta, pleading and desolate” (49). Here she fuses her own ambition and desire as an actress to get cast in a role with the motivation of her character Gretchen within the play. She also describes her marriage to Göring like she might a new acting part on the stage: “I had reached the summit of ambition for any actress in Germany. . . . When I should abandon my name I would also have to abandon the theatre. Another life was beginning – the life of Emmy Goering” (46). In his play, Fritsch likens the roles Emmy played in life as wife and mother, to the acting roles she was known for in the theatre. In this way, rather than showing Emmy’s refusal of acting upon her marriage to Hermann, Fritsch presents her life outside the theatre as simply another acting role. Emmy still believes in and plays the role of the sweet and innocent ingénue, just as she still believes, even forty years after the war, in the principles of the Third Reich. This irony is apparent, in her autobiography, when she describes it as her greatest wish that her husband Göring could also be an actor, when recounting a conversation with Hitler at her wedding:

He asked me: ‘If you could have anything you wanted Frau Goering, what would you wish for just now?’ I thought for a moment and then said, ‘That my husband should be an actor.’ ‘Good Heavens!’ said Hitler astonished. ‘Why ever that?’ ‘Because then we could be together not only in our private lives but also in our careers. We could act together and we could always be with one another’. (59)

As her marriage to Göring can be seen as a conflation of her acting with her private life, she may have achieved her wish and this is what Fritsch explores in his play.

In *Colour Instruction for Chameleons*, Gründgens was tormented by a realization that acting has permeated his entire existence; in *Enigma Emmy Göring* Emmy is tormented by toothache. In the Free Theatre production of *Enigma Emmy Göring*, Emmy sat in a dentist’s chair upon a revolving stage around which the audience, to whom her monologue was addressed, was seated. A second actor playing the dentist Dr Bösl stepped in occasionally to play a part in Emmy’s reflections. The play begins with Emmy declaring, “I’m sweet” before launching into an explanation of her desire for sweet things as a reflection of her desire to be a “sweet” woman, following Nazi ideology that demanded that women be sweet girls and

procreative mothers. As indicated in her autobiography, Fritsch attaches Emmy's identity as a sweet woman to her role as Gretchen in *Faust*. In the play, Emmy acts out short sequences as Gretchen from *Faust* and also from another role she played - Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, the opposite of the kind of woman Emmy perceived herself to be. This depiction of her acting in both 'good' and 'evil' roles and favouring Gretchen as a model for her own behaviour in life, establishes Emmy's persona as a sweet and good woman in the context of a series of acting roles. This idea of Emmy as an actress on stage and also in life was hinted at in Szabò's *Mephisto* when Lotte Lindenthal (pseudonym for Emmy Göring) is described as, "The ideal actress to play the ideal German woman". This was adapted from the line in Mann's novel, "She was the ideal on which German women molded their characters" (*Mephisto* 16). The pain in her tooth that aggravates Emmy throughout the play is a metaphor for the problems she now faces dealing with the consequences of having played the role of a "sweet" and good woman during fascism.

Fritsch shows how Emmy uses the attachment of her identity to roles in the theatre, such as Gretchen, to her advantage (in attracting a husband, for example) but is also anxious at times about the association. This is shown in one scene (taken in part from a scene Fritsch had already written in *Colour Instruction for Chameleons*) where Dr Bösl plays the part of Hitler in her memory of a conversation with him:

Emmy Göring: It is a pity that everybody still believes that an actress that kisses a man who is not her husband on the stage, that she also as a private person... [she cries] that she also as a private person is loose.

Hitler: My dear good faithful Emmy, you are the living proof that this is not so. On the contrary, the art of the actor consists exactly in playing to the audience false kisses. With real feeling. Or real kisses with false feeling.

Emmy's confusion becomes Hitler's confusion. As they continue their conversation, a blurring between acting in the theatre and in life continues:

Emmy Göring: But the question that worries me most, my Führer, is how well am I allowed to play an evil person on the stage?

Hitler: Good and evil, good and evil, good and evil, that doesn't play any role in the theatre. Good and bad acting, that plays a role for an actor, good and bad acting, that's what theatre is all about. It's better to play a loose woman well than a good woman loosely.

Emmy Göring: But I can't help it that I'm a good person. God has made me so.

Hitler: A good person! A good person! A good person, my dear Emmy! In reality there are, perhaps excepting myself, no good people Emmy. In reality there are only good actors.

Emmy Göring: But my Führer, my Führer, *you*, you, you are the living proof that this is not at all the case.

In Fritsch's comic irony, Emmy worries about being 'cast' as an evil person in life because she has played an evil character (such as Lady Macbeth) on the stage. Like Gründgens' in *Faust Chroma*, Emmy displays a chameleon like mentality when she resolves at the end of this dialogue with Hitler that, "What I have understood is that it doesn't matter what role we play in life, a good or a bad role, the main thing is to play well". This may reflect a phrase in the real Emmy Göring's autobiography when she says: "A woman in love thinks only of her partner's success, and it is of little importance to her how he obtains it" (15).

Emmy breaks down towards the end of the performance because of her increasing toothache and the drilling of Dr Bösl: "[T]he horror, the horror". Like Gründgens in *Faust Chroma*, she cannot reconcile herself with the society she now lives in that has cast her (or more importantly her former husband) as 'evil'. The "horror" she experiences can be seen as a direct result of her 'acting' as a good person, which she has used to distance herself from her involvement in fascism. She is now confronted with the reality that history has cast her in the very centre of its politics. Klaus Mann describes Emmy's conundrum sarcastically in his novel: "Never – she thought serenely – never would this radiance fall from her; never would the tortured be avenged; never would darkness reach out to engulf her" (*Mephisto* 17). Mann reportedly sent a letter to the real life Emmy, in 1935, following her marriage to Hermann Göring, in which he wrote: "Never has so much laughter been heard at the provincial theater... Tell me, behind those rich curtains are there victims of the concentration camps? Are there bodies of people who were tortured to death, or shot to death while trying to escape, or driven to commit suicide in despair? Is there a severed head dripping with blood?" (Shapira). In his play, Fritsch shows that for Emmy to acknowledge such horrific realities would be to acknowledge (like Gründgens) that her life had been based on acting and pretending - it would be to renounce her whole existence.

In *Enigma Emmy Göring*, rather than resorting to death via suicide like Gründgens in *Faust Chroma*, Emmy retaliates. Her lines in the last moments of the performance addresses the audience with the knowledge that the principles of the Third Reich are still being played out today:

Emmy Göring: Ah Hermann, my Hermann, my Herr, my man. You will remain in the memory of man forever. Your policies will always be present in the future. In the tabloids, on the radio, on television. Your philosophy will be ever-present, obviously dressed up as democratic enlightenment. And the more channels that beat us around the ears with their sermonizing entertainment, thus turning our concentration into a distraction camp, the more

each channel will compete with other channels for the highest rating. But who had the highest ratings of all time in Germany? Adolf Hitler.

In this final speech, which can also be seen to embody the voice of the playwright addressing the period in which the play is performed, Emmy attacks the hypocrisy of the post-war society that regards itself as good, righteous and antifascist, by suggesting that fascism lives on within the capitalist logic of our present media and entertainment industries. She proposes that the reality and truth of modern society is that it is simply “dressed up” like an actress playing the role of “democratic enlightenment”. She suggests that Hitler is no different to the popular icons and celebrities we worship in the entertainment industries in our own society, and that the spectacles of fascism are not so different from the spectacles of capitalism, distracting the masses away from the (environmental, social and political) horrors which take place on a daily basis in order for it to function. Her word play on the “concentration camp” may be in bad taste. But she does turn the accusation of acting, lying and pretending onto her audience.⁵¹

The mass entertainments of our modern society that were criticised in Emmy’s final speech can be understood when compared to Brecht’s analysis of fascist theatricality, which he identified as having the same function as naturalistic theatre. He argued that naturalistic theatre is based on the Aristotelian structure (established in Ancient Greek theatre) where empathy or direct identification between actor and spectator is essential. This empathic function resulting in a cathartic purging of pity and fear is what Augustine detested as it elicits emotions in the audience for no purpose other than entertainment. Brecht was also opposed to what he termed “empathy theatre” but for a different reason - because it pacifies and depoliticises the spectator who through the purging of pity and fear accepts the world on the stage and the world in extension just as it is, and is not moved to criticise it. Brecht explained the way that in the everyday life ‘empathy theatre’ of fascism, citizens became audiences and the orator was the hero like the protagonist in a play, who made spectators say what he said and feel what he felt, sharing the heroes’ triumphs and attitudes and following him blindly: “If you completely empathize with somebody you give up criticism of him as

⁵¹ When Free Theatre Christchurch produced *Enigma Emmy Göring* and *Faust Chroma*, the department of Theatre & Film Studies at the University of Canterbury in which some members were employed, was facing disestablishment, and parallels were drawn between the oppressive society faced by Gründgens and Emmy in Germany in the 1930’s and Christchurch, New Zealand in 2008. A reference to the Christchurch, New Zealand context of *Faust Chroma* was made overtly in the final lines of the play after Gründgens’ death when Mephisto 2 says: “Oh, I am here to save Germany.” Here the extra line is added: “... and New Zealand?” Note also that Tabori was perhaps the first playwright to make a connection between New Zealand and the Nazis in a quip in *Mein Kampf* when the character of Hitler announces his decision to take over the world “Especially New Zealand” (Tabori 59).

well as of yourself. Instead of being awake you sleepwalk. Instead of doing something you let something be done to you. . . . You have the illusion of living. But in reality you vegetate. You are lived so to speak” (“ ‘Über die Theatricalität des Faschismus’ Der Messingkauf” 567-8). Brecht’s analysis can easily be applied (as Fritsch applies it in his plays) to the mass entertainments of our own period. Brecht’s acute observations emphasise the way our society has continued to deny the connection between the political and the aesthetic in modern politics.

In his work written during the war and published afterwards, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (*Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, 1951), Adorno continued his analysis of fascist theatricality begun in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, describing fascist society where, “Men are reduced to walk-on parts in a monster documentary film which has no spectators, since the least of them has his bit to do on the screen” (55). He recognises the “Fascist inclination to dismiss the reality of horror as ‘mere propaganda’ in order to perpetrate it unopposed” and the way in which, “The war is really phoney, but with a phoneyess more horrifying than all the horrors” (55).

Debord continued the discussion of spectacle in *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du Spectacle*, 1967), a critique of the spectacle of modern capitalism, writing of spectacle in similar terms to the way Brecht wrote of the “sleepwalking” of empathy theatre: “The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep” (18).⁵² Following on from Adorno, Debord wrote of fascism as an example of a society of spectacle, from which the post-war capitalist society that Emmy scorns has evolved:

Fascism presented itself for what it was – a violent resurrection of myth calling for participation in a community defined by archaic pseudo-values: race, blood, leader. Fascism is a cult of the archaic completely fitted out by modern technology. Its degenerate ersatz of myth has been revived in the spectacular context of the most modern means of conditioning and illusion. It is thus one factor in the formation of the modern spectacle, as well as being, thanks to its part in the destruction of the old workers’ movement, one of the founding forces of present-day society. (77-8)

At around the same time Adorno was writing of the spectacle of fascism, and hinting at Debord’s later writing on the subject, in 1947 Henri Lefebvre described fascism and the way

⁵² The character of Klaus Mann in *Faust Chroma* also uses a similar expression (one based on Mann’s own expression) when he advocates for the effects of suicide, which would have the effect of “waking the people from their lethargy”.

“its unreality disguises itself as the supreme reality, and tries to make true reality definitively unreal” (qtd. in Moore’s preface in Lefebvre xvi).

Debord uses a theatrical analogy to expand on his analysis of the way American consumer capitalism is a direct descendant of fascism, “inasmuch as fascism happens also to be the costliest method of maintaining the capitalist order, it was normal enough that it should be dislodged by more rational and stronger forms of this order – that it should leave the front of the stage to the lead players, namely the capitalist States” (78). Debord recognises the importance of leaders as celebrities within such a society of the spectacle:

This dictatorship must therefore be attended by permanent violence. Its spectacle imposes an image of the good which is a résumé of everything that exists officially, and this is usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system’s totalitarian cohesiveness. Everyone must identify magically with this absolute celebrity – or disappear. For this figure is the master of not-being-consumed, and the heroic image appropriate to the absolute exploitation constituted by primitive accumulation accelerated by terror. (42)

Such a society results in a situation where “the individual’s own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere” (23). He sees these powerful individuals who rule the society of the spectacle, as “participants in a basic lie: they have to play the part of the proletariat governing a socialist society; they are actors faithful to the text of ideological betrayal. Yet their effective participation in this counterfeit being has to be perceived as real” (74-5).

Elsaesser, following Adorno, notes the way the Nazis destroyed the division between acting and living in their “use of mass media as tools of entertainment and propaganda, or rather: of entertainment as propaganda” (Machtans et. al. 92-93). He describes how Syberberg made the connection between fascism and its legacy in American society in *Hitler: A film from Germany*, when he also showed the way Hitler lives on in our own media and entertainment industries: “Hitler had already, in his appropriation and use of the media, anticipated his own revival as a spectacle, that guaranteed his ‘survival on celluloid’ ” (Elsaesser qtd. in Machtans et. al. 91). Debord notes that having taken lessons from the Nazis, we have created our own modern day spectacle, which exists at “the very heart of society’s real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life” (13).

Following Debord's logic which is arguably even more applicable forty years on, we can see ourselves in Emmy's position, as actors in a modern spectacle - a "distraction camp" - worshipping a celebrity dictatorship which fronts a capitalist regime, in whose brutalities we are complicit, and whose lies we are eager to believe:

The spectacle erases... the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. The individual, though condemned to the passive acceptance of an alien everyday reality, is thus driven into a form of madness... (Debord 153).

In Tertullian's and Augustine's logic, we have been seduced into replacing the truth of God with the lies of the devil who has triumphed as the 'puppet master' over our false existence.

Chapter Two: Refusal in Sexual Theatricality

In my first chapter I examined several works of theatre and film that explored the phenomenon where acting, as something false but seductive, became a part of the political reality of life during fascism, and I focused on how they represented the desire to refuse acting within this fascist context. In this second chapter I examine two works that explore the seductive nature of acting directly by exposing the acting demanded in sexual role-play, the connection this acting has to the society in which it exists, and the desire to refuse it. I begin with *Distraction Camp* (2009) a theatrical work by Free Theatre that took its title from Emmy's final speech in *Enigma Emmy Göring*, and used scenes from Genet's *The Balcony* to explore the 'acting' demanded in our modern society of the spectacle through the lens of sexual role-play. In the second half of this chapter I examine from a feminist perspective Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007) as a cinematic exploration of the refusal of acting in sexual role-play.

The Balcony (1957) Jean Genet

Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1956) is set during a time of revolution in which men go to the brothel to act out their sexual fantasies. The brothel, named The Grand Balcony, is also referred to as a "House of Illusions," an obvious reference to the theatre. The linking of the theatre with the brothel is historical and exhibited by writers from Augustine to Artaud. Barish notes that for the Christian anti-theatricalists:

The link is clearly a sexual one: in the mimes and pantomimes women exhibited their bodies, castrated actors played feminine roles with much lascivious realism, and the dramatic fare ran heavily to bawdry and sexual excitation. Going to the shows must have seemed to many Romans like visiting the stews – equally urgent, equally provocative of guilt, and hence equally in need of being scourged by a savage backlash of official disapproval. (42-43)

This Christian notion of sexuality as something false and theatrical is emphasised by Genet in *The Balcony*. He specifies exaggeration and overt theatricality in the costumes, stage-design and acting style. In a "Note" to the 1960 edition of the play, he writes that this exaggeration

should be contrasted at times with more natural passages to make the exaggeration seem more “outrageous” (*The Balcony* xi).⁵³

In *The Balcony*, the brothel is overseen by Madame Irma whose position within it is as the ‘director’ in a theatrical sense. However, the scenes that take place outside the brothel are not represented as a truthful antidote to this false world in the way that the Christian anti-theatricalists would insist. On the contrary, Genet suggests that the real world outside the brothel is also based on acting and sexual role-play. Carl Lavery mentions the temptation of critics to compare *The Balcony* to Pedro Calderón’s *Life is a Dream* (*La vida es sueño*, 1635) as an example of *theatrum mundi*, but points out that, “Where Calderón’s theatricality is intended to reveal the presence of God, Genet’s reveals nothingness” (*The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 115).⁵⁴ Genet makes the connection between acting and living throughout the play. For example, in the first three scenes three successive male clients take on the roles inside the brothel of authority figures from real life - the Bishop, the Judge and the General. Sexual role-playing is thus directly connected to power. In an interview with Hubert Fichte, Genet said:

What is a theatre? First of all what is power? It seems to me that power can never do without theatricality. Never. Sometimes the theatricality is simplified, sometimes it’s modified, but there is always theatricality. Power covers and protects itself by means of theatricality. . . . There is one place in the world where theatricality does not hide power, and that’s in the theater. (*The Declared Enemy* 131-32)⁵⁵

In a world made up of acting, Genet presents the brothel as a kind of theatre, a place where ‘acting’ in life can be exposed and acknowledged. The clients who come into the brothel to play the roles of authority figures can be seen to do so as a result of their

⁵³ While *The Balcony* was first published in 1956, Genet rewrote the play extensively over the next six years, publishing five different versions (White 480). In this thesis all citations from the play are from the 1991 translation by Terry Hands (who also directed the play using this translation in 1971) and Barbara Wright who reincorporated material that does not appear in Genet’s 1962 version translated by Bernard Frechtman (Genet, *The Balcony* trans. Wright and Hands vii). There is also a 1968 edition published in Genet’s *Oeuvres Complètes*. White notes that Genet made further revisions in 1975 although these do not appear to be published (480). For a detailed comparison between the different editions and their exploration of revolution see David H. Walker, “Revolution and Revisions in Genet’s ‘Le Balcon’ ”.

⁵⁴ *The Balcony* has also been termed an example of “Pirandellism”, in the tradition of the plays of Luigi Pirandello where “life and theatre are both pretense” (Melcher 33). See Edith Melcher, “The Pirandellism of Jean Genet”. Pirandello’s play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, 1921) uses the theatre as Genet uses the brothel, to explore role-playing. However, I do not examine it in this thesis as it does not explore a refusal of acting nor of fascist or sexual theatricality in particular.

⁵⁵ Joseph Strick worked together with Genet to direct a film of *The Balcony* (1963), which was set in a film studio enabling a comparison between the film industry and the brothel: “[T]he true brothel of ideas and physicality in our world is the movie studio. There you can readily find the sets, the props, the actors and even the producers, who love to act out the role of the Chief of Police” (Strick qtd. in Bradby and Finburgh 137). Genet left the project before completion (White 531).

dissatisfaction in society. They refuse their social roles as oppressed citizens in life in favour of playing the roles of their powerful oppressors in the brothel. This could be seen as a “rehearsal for revolution” in Boalian terms.⁵⁶ Genet was a revolutionary and *The Balcony*, like much of his writing, is an attack against and refusal of the falseness and hypocrisies of bourgeois society and its institutions that curtailed his freedoms especially during his early life. Years later he explains his desire to write as it emerged during his time in prisons: “I wrote for the drunkenness, the ecstasy, and to cut ever more deeply the links that still attached me to a world that rejected me and that I rejected in turn” (qtd. in White 213).

However, at the same time that Genet positions the brothel as a place of revolution where the clients (and the prostitutes) could be seen as revolutionaries within it, he also suggests that acting in the brothel could be pure escapism - a place where revolutionary desires are purged and neutralised and where the authority figures that the clients are fighting against are actually worshipped and their power reaffirmed. In the play, the brothel is one of the institutions that the revolutionaries outside it attempt to destroy. It is implied perhaps that these true revolutionaries want to refuse acting all together. Genet insists on maintaining the ambiguity in his play: “Do the rebels exist *inside* the brothel or outside it? The equivocation must be maintained until the end” (*The Balcony* xii).

At one point during the play, the revolutionaries outside the brothel surround it. After having (apparently) killed the real life authority figures and destroyed the institutions in which they were housed, they are now poised to destroy the institution of the brothel. Madame Irma, with the encouragement of the Chief of Police, decides to preserve her institution and defeat them. The three clients who have just finished playing the Bishop, the Judge and the General and remain trapped in the brothel, are encouraged to dress up again along with the Chief of Police acting as a “Hero” and Madame Irma acting as the Queen. Together they appear on the balcony of the brothel to address the revolutionaries. From the perspective of the clients inside the brothel this could be seen as taking their revolutionary desires out into real life. However, once this acting is taken outside of the brothel, the clients are no longer able (and perhaps no longer desire) to expose it as an illusion and so any revolutionary potential disappears. The authority figures are resurrected via acting, as the clients themselves become, in real life, the figures of power that had previously oppressed them.

⁵⁶ See Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* where he writes that “the theater itself is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution” (122).

In addition, the revolutionaries outside the brothel - rather than refusing the 'acting' of these resurrected figures - are defeated by their own 'acting'. The revolution has been incarnated in the image of Chantal, a former prostitute in the brothel who uses her acting and singing skills outside it to play the part of a revolutionary effigy: "The brothel has taught me the art of acting many roles. I've played so many parts, I know them all" (73). As she appears on the balcony to sing for the revolutionaries, she is shot, and with her death, alongside the reinstated authority figures, dies all the revolutionary desire incarnated as it had become in her image. The revolution is defeated by exactly the aestheticising it was fighting against. Gene A. Plunka notes that this process begins when the revolutionaries "lose their focus and begin to admire themselves as celebrities" ("Genet's 'The Balcony'. A 1981 Perspective on a 1979/80 Production" 44). As Robert Brustein notes, "rebellion and order are merely two roles in the same masquerade" (394). Schechner in his 1979-80 production with The Performance Group, demonstrated this idea by representing the revolution, not as something occurring outside the brothel, but simply as one of the various fantasy "themes" inside the brothel itself ("Genet's 'The Balcony'. A 1981 Perspective on a 1979/80 Production" 84).

Terry Hands, who directed *The Balcony* in 1971, observes that as an effect of this aestheticising of the revolution "the revolutionaries are hell-bent on reproducing the very system they want to overthrow" (Hands qtd. in Bradby and Finburgh 140). As Lavery states in *The Politics of Jean Genet's Late Theatre: Spaces of Revolution* (2010): "Chantal's murder does more than mark the defeat of revolutionary hope; it establishes a more repressive, totalitarian regime" (114). The fact that an oppressive regime like national socialism was totalitarian but also considered socialist (at least initially), explains the reason Genet wanted to make the politics in his play ambiguous. This is apparent for example, when Roger the revolutionary leader and Chantal's lover, laments "Nobody, neither side, we none of us remember the reasons for our revolution any more" (*The Balcony* 73). Philip Auslander in *Presence and Resistance* notes that in an essay about the revolution of 1968, "The Politics of Ecstasy", Richard Schechner wrote that "the 'same ecstasy' that informed the activities of the counterculture 'can be unleashed in the Red Guards or horrifically channeled toward the Nuremberg rallies and Auschwitz.... The hidden fear I have about the new expression is that its forms come perilously close to ecstatic fascism' " (Schechner qtd. in *Presence and Resistance* 41). Žižek however, emphasises the socialist origins of such spectacles: "[N]ot only are such mass performances not inherently Fascist; they are not even 'neutral', waiting to be appropriated by Left or Right – it was Nazism that stole them and appropriated them from the workers' movement, their original site of birth" (qtd. in Rancière 78).

This theatrical or false life both inside and outside the brothel (theatre) that Genet exposes can be seen as an early critique of the society of the spectacle that Fritsch also attacks in *Enigma Emmy Göring*. While Genet wrote the play in 1955, twelve years before Debord's analysis of such a society in 1967, the revolution outside the brothel is shown to be constructed by the revolutionaries as a spectacle:

Mark: We must counter their carnival with our own.

Roger: Carnival?

Mark: We must use Chantal. Her job's to embody the revolution. (56)

And in another passage:

Mark: We must invent a Chantal who becomes more and more fabulous! Loudspeakers everywhere. Her voice at all the barricades. Photos. Her face on all the hoardings. Print leaflets, thousands of them – get them distributed. Bright colours. With a picture of her and a declaration. Invent a historic slogan signed Chantal. Write a poem to the glory of anger, revolution, war. (57)

By showing the conversion of revolutionary desire into a spectacle, Genet seems to confirm the claim that Debord went on to make that, “In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood” (Debord 14). The revolution is contained and assimilated by the very system it sets out to destroy. Lavery observes the way the depiction of revolution in *The Balcony* “explores the difficulty of revolutionary action in a capitalist economy manipulated by a spectacular notion of community” (*The Politics of Jean Genet's Late Theatre* 64). Fredric Jameson, in 1977, when reflecting on the Nazi period, argues that,

the fundamental difference between our own situation and that of the thirties is the emergence in full-blown and definitive form of that ultimate transformation of late monopoly capitalism variously known as the *société de consommation* or as post-industrial society. . . . The system has a power to co-opt and to defuse even the most potentially dangerous forms of political art by transforming them into cultural commodities. (qtd. in Adorno and Benjamin et. al. 208)

Derrida and Roudinesco note that, “if we want to save the Revolution, it is necessary to transform the very idea of revolution. What is outdated, old, worn out, impracticable, for many reasons, is a certain theater of revolution, a certain process of seizing power with which the revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1917 are generally associated” (Derrida and Roudinesco qtd. in Marchart 114).

Genet's representation of reality may be closest to that of Baudrillard's in *Simulacra and Simulation* (*Simulacres et Simulation* 1981). Baudrillard declares that Debord's society of the spectacle no longer exists: “We are no longer in the society of the spectacle, of which

the situationists spoke, nor in the specific kinds of alienation and repression that it implied” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 30). Baudrillard argues that spectacle has become “diffused” into reality: “Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (19).

Baudrillard replaces Debord’s concept of spectacle with that of “simulation”. He makes clear that simulation is not pretending in the way acting (as something false which disguises reality) is understood by Nietzsche and the anti-theatricalists: “[P]retending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact... whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’ ” (3). Baudrillard describes a society where, “art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. . . . Reality no longer has the time to take on the appearance of reality” (*Simulations* 151-2). He further describes this phenomenon in *Fatal Strategies (Les Stratégies fatales, 1983)*: “We are all actors and spectators; there is no more stage: the stage is everywhere; no more rules: everyone plays out his own drama, improvising on his own fantasies” (63). The aestheticising in Genet’s play of the brothel as well as society outside it could be seen as creating this pervasive environment in which ‘acting’ becomes reality because there is no other reality possible.

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death (L’échange symbolique et la mort, 1976)*

Baudrillard likens society to a brothel when he writes: “This is what the generalized brothel (*bordel*) of capital is, not a brothel of prostitution, but a brothel of substitution and commutation” (Baudrillard qtd. in Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* 64). As a place of acting and artifice, the brothel could be seen to enable the illusion of a real world outside it. Baudrillard describes this phenomenon using the example of Disneyland: “Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that is Disneyland” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 12). In a simulated society, image takes on significant importance in its replication of, and substitution for, the real event. In *The Balcony* a mirror is specified as an important part of the set within the brothel and in his note “How to perform *The Balcony*” Genet states that the play must be performed as “the glorification of the Image and the Reflection” (xiii).⁵⁷ Baudrillard uses the term simulacrum to describe what emerges through the process of simulation. Genet uses this term several times during the play in scenes with the Chief of Police who regularly visits the brothel as

⁵⁷ In 1951, several years before Genet wrote *The Balcony*, Adorno’s comments in his discussion of men during fascism playing roles in “a monster documentary film”, can also be seen as a move towards the concept of simulation: “It is as if the reified, hardened plaster-cast of events takes the place of events themselves” (*Minima Moralia* 55).

Madame Irma's lover and is concerned that no client has as yet wanted to become a "simulacrum" of him.⁵⁸

In one scene Madame Irma is conflicted as to whether or not to "act" on the balcony as Queen, which she equates with a complete renunciation of her former identity. The Chief of Police tries to assure her that this will not be the case:

Chief of Police: We'll see each other every day.

Madame Irma: You'll see the Queen, and I the Hero.

Chief of Police: With us inside.

Madame Irma: No. We must reduce 'us' till we disappear. So that when we die, what will seem to die will only be a gilded corpse. (67)

Here the Chief of Police suggests that they will only be acting as the Queen and the Hero and that their true identities will remain. Madame Irma's rejection of his belief suggests that she (and perhaps Genet) believes that this is not possible and that whatever is 'acted' in everyday life will become reality itself (a prefiguring of Baudrillard's theory). At Madame Irma's suggestion, that acting the role of the Queen will result in the erasure of her former identity, the Chief of Police says: "Then refuse – there's still time". Madame Irma replies: "But I'm doing it for you, George – for your simulacrum and your tomb" (67). Madame Irma sacrifices her own identity in order to reinstate the figureheads of the Monarchy, the Army, the Courts, the Police and the Church.⁵⁹

After the success of the 'acting' on the balcony and the failure of the revolution, Roger goes to the brothel and becomes the first person to play the role (and become the "simulacrum") of the Chief of Police - his great adversary. Roger explains that, "out there, in what you call life, everything has been destroyed. Truth wasn't possible..." (93). Truth or real action are not possible in a simulated society. In the role of the Chief of Police within the Mausoleum Studio of the brothel Roger castrates (and presumably kills) himself. His symbolic castration (murder) of the Chief of Police via his own castration (suicide) can be read as an attempt to refuse acting and to commit a final revolutionary act. Schechner took this view in his own production: "Seeing the whole thing [revolution] parodied and commercialized in the whorehouse, he [Roger] performs one authentic act: his castration"

⁵⁸ Ralph Yarrow notes that "politicians rarely do anything without consulting an image consultant. They, like the clients of the 'Le Grand Balcon', erect a simulacrum, an unimpeachable ideal self" (Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova 226).

⁵⁹ Where "simulacre" appears in Genet's text, Terry Hands and Barbara Wright translate it consistently as "simulacrum". Bernard Frechtman however, in the first 1962 English translation alternates between "simulation", "impersonation" and "make-believe" - thereby significantly altering the meaning of the text. This particular passage between Madame Irma and the Chief of Police is omitted from Frechtman's translation and several of the French editions.

(“Genet’s ‘The Balcony’...” 97). Alternatively, Robert Brustein in *The Theatre of Revolt* has a different interpretation of this scene suggesting that in castrating himself in the role of the Chief of Police, Roger “has determined to become an actor in the comedy of illusion, and a chief actor too” (401). Gene Plunka notes that other critics explain Roger’s act as an action of despair, self-punishment or even attempted sainthood (“Le Balcon (The Balcony)” 211).⁶⁰ I argue that these readings, along with Brustein’s, ‘castrate’ Roger’s act of its revolutionary potential and the implications of its failure are therefore also diminished. For example, if Roger’s castration is a refusal of acting, the fact that it is assimilated into a performance and an act of despair nonetheless, contributes to Genet’s analysis of the oppressive aestheticising of revolutionary impulses in society. The real Chief of Police who is witnessing Roger’s “simulacrum” and castration of his image, declares that Roger, a tradesman, simply had no idea how to act in such a role:

Chief of Police: Well played. Well played! (*Moving to the centre of the stage*). Thought he’d got me for a moment. (*His hands go to his flies. Very obviously he feels the weight of his balls, then reassured, heaves a sigh of relief.*) Still there - thank God! Still intact, gentlemen, still intact! My image may not be, but I am. The plumber just didn’t understand his role - that’s all. (94)

Genet demonstrates that in this society, both inside and outside the brothel, a refusal of ‘acting’ (i.e. authenticity) is not possible. Thirty years later Baudrillard wrote in elucidating terms of the way refusal within a simulated society can in fact be seen to reaffirm its power: “All the powers, all the institutions speak of themselves through denial, in order to attempt, by simulating death, to escape their real death throes. Power can stage its own murder to rediscover a glimmer of existence and legitimacy” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 19).⁶¹

At the end of the play, Madame Irma is transformed as the Queen up until the point where, after Roger’s castration, the Chief of Police, ecstatic that someone has now become a simulacrum of him, retires to his tomb (the particular fetish that the Mausoleum studio

⁶⁰ Plunka believes that a reading of Roger’s castration as resignation and renunciation is supported by Genet’s comments when Genet compares Roger’s act to the Republican revolutionaries who acknowledged their defeat after Franco’s victory (“Le Balcon (The Balcony)” 212). Lionel Abel cannot comprehend Roger’s act in the play at all: “The episode is brutal, vulgar and utterly undramatic” (330). Although he seems to recognise that this may be the point: “[T]he destruction of illusion, as represented by *The Balcony* would be the destruction of life as such” (330).

⁶¹ A similar act occurs at the end of Genet’s earlier play *The Maids*, where Solange (role-playing Claire) murders Claire (as she is role-playing as Madame). It can be interpreted that this ‘murder’ of Madame, what both maids had long fantasized about, is made possible by Claire’s real suicide (as Claire willingly plays the role of Madame when Solange *really* kills her). This is also a scene where the world of acting is refused in favour of a real act. And as Martin Esslin notes in his comparison of *The Maids* and *The Balcony*, “neither Claire nor Roger can break out into reality” (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 187).

enables). As soon as he is encased in his tomb the Queen starts to undress and returns to her identity as Madame Irma. In doing so, her earlier conversation with the Chief of Police where she spoke of becoming the Queen as an erasure of her former identity as Madame Irma, is revealed to have been acting – role-playing as part of his sexual fantasy. This can be seen as evidence that within Genet’s play there is only simulation. There is no ‘becoming’ real. There is simply a continuous exchanging of roles. And in such a simulated society, Genet suggests that perhaps the brothel (or the theatre) is the only place where ‘acting’, if it can’t be refused (without dying, as Roger discovers), can at least be acknowledged. Madame Irma at this point also gives permission for the ‘authority figures’ on the balcony to return to their identities as clients in the brothel: “Gentlemen, you are free!” (95). When they play the roles of the authority figures outside of the brothel on the balcony, the men are not able to exchange or question them, yet once back inside the brothel, they are once again “free” to go from one role to another. In a simulated society perhaps this is the only freedom possible.⁶²

Genet shared Brecht’s disavowal of Aristotelian empathy theatre in an attempt to expose the ‘acting’ and falseness of authority figures in society: “Marionettes would, I know do better. They are already being considered” (“A Note on Theatre” 39). On an aesthetic level however, Genet embraced exaggeration and falseness in the representation of his characters, bringing “theatre into the theatre” (“A Note on Theatre” 38). As Sartre noted when writing about *The Maids* in *Saint Genet: Actor & Martyr* (*Saint Genet: Comédien et Martyr*, 1952), Genet did this in order to find truth: “[I]n order ‘to be true’ the actor must *play false*” (620). In doing so Sartre believes, “Genet *betrays* his actors. He unmasks them, and the performer, seeing his imposture exposed, finds himself in the position of a culprit who has been found out” (612).⁶³

In his 1962 “Note” to *The Balcony*, Genet describes the function of Aristotelian theatre:

When the problem of a certain disorder – or evil – has been solved on stage, this shows that it has in fact been abolished, since, according to the dramatic

⁶² Maria Shevtsova, however, is adamant that “Genet does not re-run Baudrillard. Nor do his worlds of simulations and simulacra, where everyone plays at being someone else, deny all possibility of reality. . . . The problem lies in identifying these referents in Genet’s theatre” (Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova 45-46). Unfortunately, Shevtsova does not give an example of how these referents are identified in the play. For further discussion of *The Balcony* in relation to Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra see Lavery, “Between Negativity and Resistance: Jean Genet and Committed Theatre”; Gary Backhaus, “The Hidden Realities of the Everyday Life-World in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Genet’s *The Balcony*”; and Scott Durham, “Genet: Simulation, Resistance, Metamorphosis” in *Phantom Communities: The Simulacrum and the Limits of Postmodernism*.

⁶³ While Sartre wrote this in *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (*Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*, 1952) before Genet wrote *The Balcony*, his analysis of Genet’s use of acting in the theatre remains relevant to discussion of *The Balcony*.

conventions of our times, a theatrical representation can only be the representation of a fact. We can then turn our minds to something else, and allow our hearts to swell with pride, seeing that we took the side of the hero who aimed – successfully – at finding the solution. . . . It is not the function of the artist or the poet to find a practical solution to the problems of evil. (xiv)

Rather than the conservative function of Aristotelian theatre, Genet aimed for a theatre which did not resolve things for an audience: “[T]he evil shown on the stage should explode, should show us naked, and leave us distraught, if possible, and having no other recourse than ourselves. . . . [T]he work must be an active explosion, an act to which the public reacts – as it wishes, as it can” (*The Balcony* xiv). Lavery believes: “*The Balcony* is best defined as an allegory about the work of art in an age of spectacle. It is a play that attempts to evade appropriation by the dominant order, while, at the same time, taking a stand against that order” (*The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 126).⁶⁴

In 1968 Genet stopped writing about revolution in the theatre, becoming a revolutionary in life instead. At this time he also forbade all future performances of his plays (White 579). This suggests that he had lost faith in the ability of theatre to revolutionise society. It may have been a response to the aestheticising of revolution that he felt was unavoidable in the theatre. He spent several years living with both Palestinians and the Black Panthers - groups marginalised and disempowered by the violent regimes of Israel and America. Lavery believes, however, that rather than being a refusal of acting and aestheticising, Genet’s move into political activism was a continuation of it: “Unlike Walter Benjamin who considered the aestheticisation of politics to be synonymous with Fascism. . . . [.] Genet believes that emancipatory politics are always already aestheticised: the struggle for a new life is a poetic demand that insists on being concretised” (*The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 43). And so: “[H]is abandonment of theatre was, in no way, synonymous with an abandonment of the aesthetic in its expanded sense. Rather revolution, for him, was the best method for integrating aesthetics into life itself” (47-8).

Yet in 1975 it appeared Genet’s desire for revolution in real life had also faded. In an interview he said:

⁶⁴ In “Between Negativity and Resistance: Jean Genet and Committed Theatre” Lavery discusses *The Balcony* in relation to Philip Auslander’s notion of ‘resistant political art’ in the age of spectacle. He writes that Sartre, Brecht and Adorno’s notion of negative aesthetics has become redundant: “[H]is [Genet’s] plays have much in common with Adorno’s notion of negative aesthetics. But where Adorno believes that negative art has the power to transform the world by itself, Genet has less faith in the aesthetic as a realm of value and authenticity His aim is to place negativity at the heart of everyday life. To that extent, his work anticipates what Auslander calls resistance” (234).

I'm not all that eager for there to be a revolution. If I'm really sincere, I have to say that I don't particularly want it. The current situation, the current regimes allow me to revolt, but a revolution would probably not allow me to revolt, that is, to revolt individually. But this regime allows me to revolt individually. I can be against it. But if there were a real revolution, I might not be able to be against it. . . . I would like for the world not to change so that I can be against the world. (*The Declared Enemy* 132)

Nevertheless, in a 1985 interview reflecting back on the situation in France during May 1968, he suggests that revolution is still possible and perhaps something he desires. He discusses the event when student revolutionaries occupied a theatre: "If they had been real revolutionaries, they wouldn't have occupied a theater, especially not the National Theater. They would have occupied the law courts, the prisons, the radio. . . . They didn't do that. . . . [I]t went on and on and never went outside the theater, you see? Exactly, or more or less, the way the revolutionaries in *The Balcony* never leave the brothel" (*The Declared Enemy* 263).⁶⁵

Before Genet, Antonin Artaud, the revolutionary French writer, dramatist and also actor, had used theatre to refuse acting, as practiced in both bourgeois theatre and society.⁶⁶ He published his famous manifestos for the theatre in *The Theater and its Double* (*Le Théâtre et son Double*, 1938) in which he criticised bourgeois Aristotelian empathy theatre for "showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets" in the way that Genet went on to compare actors in bourgeois theatre to marionettes (84).⁶⁷ Artaud saw it necessary to destroy this theatre and devised a theatrical form of which the intent was to strip away what he called the "social mask", revealing for the audience in this act of "cruelty", something truthful.⁶⁸ As Claude Schumacher describes it: "According to Artaud, theatre is life lived with authenticity. Life without lies, life without pretense, life without hypocrisy. Life which is the opposite of role-playing. Theatre means absence of 'theatre' " (xxiii). This would appear to be contradicted by Genet's desire to bring "theatre into the theatre", but they can

⁶⁵ Genet notes that the student occupation occurred in the same theatre, the Théâtre de l'Odéon, where his play about the Algerian conflict, *The Screens*, had been staged two years earlier in 1966 and where right wing revolutionaries had stormed the theatre during a performance (*The Declared Enemy* 263). Genet's biographer describes the violent interruption by supporters (who included Jean-Marie Le Pen) of French Imperialism in Algeria about which Genet's play was in opposition: "[A] group of commandos rushed the stage... threw bottles and a chair from the balcony, while a commando group of twenty came down the central aisle igniting smoke bombs" (White 566). This failed revolutionary action (Algeria's independence from French rule continued) echoes the revolutionaries failed attempt to destroy the brothel in *The Balcony*.

⁶⁶ Like Genet he also refused political categorization. One of his reasons for leaving the surrealist movement, with whom he had initially identified, was when it became connected to the communist party (Esslin, *Artaud* 29).

⁶⁷ As with many of the writers and artists I have discussed, Baudrillard also likens politicians to "mannequins" and "puppets of power" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 19; 23).

⁶⁸ Barish misunderstands these aims when he describes Artaud's intention to "turn his actors too into puppets or mechanical dolls by giving them deliberately unnatural gestures" (454).

both be seen in their different ways to share the aim of refusing the falseness of the acting that existed in theatre and the ‘acting’ that existed in society, at that time.⁶⁹ Where Artaud attempted to incite his audiences to “absolute freedom in revolt”, Genet went on to advocate for artistic work that is “essentially violent and inflammatory, in the sense that it refuses to submit to any value or to any authority” (29; Genet qtd. in Lavery, *The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 87). The “active explosion” Genet described in his 1962 “Note” to *The Balcony* is precisely the function Artaud aimed for in his theatre. Herbert Blau wrote in 1964 that Genet’s theatre is “the most scrupulous realization to date of Artaud’s vision” (262-63). And Brustein a year later wrote that in Genet, “Artaud would unquestionably have seen his most promising heir” (377). Brustein believes that “Genet, the dramatist, in short, is largely created by Artaud. Indeed, their extra-dramatic utterances are sometimes so similar that it is difficult to tell which man is speaking” (378).⁷⁰

Artaud’s desire to reject the falseness of acting in the theatre has much in common with the Christian anti-theatricalists. In 1922, for example, Artaud likened the bourgeois theatre of his time to the brothel: “There are those who go to the theatre as they would go to a brothel. Furtive pleasure. . . [,] false theatre that is deceptive, easy, middle-class, a theatre for soldiers, bourgeois, businessmen, wine merchants, water-colour teachers, adventurers, whores and *Prix de Rome*” (qtd. in Schumacher 6). In another passage he writes: “We cannot go on prostituting the idea of theatre” (89). Artaud even uses similar language as the Christian anti-theatricalists. For example, when Augustine describes the theatre as a “hissing cauldron of lust”, Artaud talks about: “These torments, seductions, and lusts before which we are nothing but Peeping Toms gratifying our cravings” (77). Like Augustine, Artaud firmly rejected the theatre as a place of entertainment: “The theatre would be greatly enhanced if we got rid of all those who currently make their living out of providing entertainment, and be it theatre, music-hall, cabaret or brothel, it’s all the same stinking business” (Artaud qtd. in Schumacher xxiv). He describes this entertainment theatre as “useless, artificial amusement. . . [and] cheap imitations of reality” (60).

⁶⁹ Their differences in approach to this may have been the reason Genet denied any influence by Artaud (White 349). Although Cetta writes that Genet praised Artaud’s work in a letter to J.J. Pauvert in 1954 (7). Genet also spoke of him in association with the Marquis de Sade: “Sade and Artaud encounter the same necessity of finding within themselves that which, it is thought, will lead them into glory, that is, despite the walls, the moats, the jailers, and the judges, into the light and into minds free from servitude” (*The Declared Enemy* 50). Barber notes that Artaud also “seems to have taken no notice whatsoever” of Genet’s work probably because of his (Genet’s) association with Sartre (11).

⁷⁰ Cetta writes that Roger’s act of castration in *The Balcony*, “comes about as close as one can to pure Artaudian theatre” (52). And as Bernard Dort sees it in a kind of reversal of history: “Artaud could be said to begin where Genet leaves off” (Brooks and Halpern 159).

Artaud was directly inspired by Augustine's comparison of the theatre with the plague, writing: "In *The City of God* St. Augustine complains of the similarity between the action of the plague that kills without destroying the organs and the theater which, without killing, provokes the most mysterious alterations in the mind of not only an individual but an entire populace" (26). But rather than condemning acting in the theatre altogether like Augustine, Artaud saw potential for a new kind of theatre as a positive and vital force that could (like the plague) mysteriously alter the consciousness of society:

The theater, like the plague, is in the image of this carnage and this essential separation. It releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life. . . . Perhaps the theater's poison, injected into the social body, disintegrates it, as Saint Augustine says, but at least it does so as a plague, as an avenging scourge, a redeeming epidemic in which credulous ages have chosen to see the finger of God. . . . [T]he action of theater, like that of plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world. (31)

Artaud saw the theatre in mystic terms, as a positive and redemptive source of truth and revelation.

Madame Irma in *The Balcony* discusses the revolution as something seductive and contagious in similar terms to Artaud's discussion of the plague: "(Inexorably) The town is full of corpses. All the roads are cut off. Even the peasants are going over to the revolution. Goodness knows why. Contagion, perhaps. The revolution's an epidemic. It has the same sacred fatality" (26). She describes the contagion of the revolution, as Augustine saw the theatre, in a negative light. Artaud, however, believed the theatre, his kind of theatre, should inspire revolution: "[O]ur present state is iniquitous and should be destroyed. If this is a fact for the theater to be preoccupied with, it is even more a matter for machine guns" (42). He saw potential for the acting in his theatre to spill (like a plague or a revolution) into everyday life as a way to refuse 'acting' and pretending.⁷¹

Similar to Brecht writing about the somnambulance inducing "empathy theatre" and Debord about the "wish for sleep" induced by the society of the spectacle, Artaud describes the soporific effect of modern life: "How hard it is, when everything encourages us to sleep, though we may look about us with conscious, clinging eyes, to wake and yet look about us as

⁷¹ In 1922 Artaud acted in and designed the costumes and set for a production of Calderón's *theatrum mundi* inspired *Life is a Dream* directed by Charles Dullin (Brustein 7). The fusion of acting and living that Calderón explores may have inspired Artaud, who described it at the time as a "wonderful play" (Sontag, *Antonin Artaud* 18). Calderón explored the *theatrum mundi* idea most explicitly in *The Great Theater of the World* (*El gran teatro del mundo*, 1635).

in a dream, with eyes that no longer know their function and whose gaze is turned inward” (11). In criticising the false reality of society Artaud’s writing anticipated the work of theorists such as Debord and Baudrillard. Like Roger attempts to refuse acting and simulation in *The Balcony*, Artaud would have rejected the notion of a simulated society, as Baudrillard himself recognises:

The reality of simulation is unbearable – crueler than Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty, which was still an attempt to create a dramaturgy of life, the last gasp of an ideality of the body, of blood, of violence in a system that was already taking it away, toward a reabsorption of all the stakes without a trace of blood. For us the trick has been played. All dramaturgy, and even all real writing of cruelty has disappeared. Simulation is the master. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 38-9)

Interestingly, Artaud embraced spectacle in his Theatre of Cruelty aiming to “resuscitate an idea of total spectacle” (86). Sontag discusses how Artaud has in common with Nietzsche (and even the fascists) a desire for a spectacle like that of Wagner’s “Gesamtkunstwerk” (qtd. in Scheer 91). His discussion of spectacle, which he wrote during the 1930s, contains similarities to the spectacle of fascism: “[T]he Theater of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets” (85). However, Artaud’s theatrical spectacles were certainly not intended to stupefy and hypnotise his audiences in the way of fascist spectacles. Rather, Artaud intended his spectacles to have the opposite effect, of waking them up.⁷²

Artaud’s final public appearance was in 1947 inside a theatre in front of nine hundred journalists, writers, directors, playwrights and actors who were invited to a public “tete a tete” with the famous writer (Schumacher 180). Artaud describes the experience in a letter to Andre Breton:

ah yes, I appeared on stage, once more, for
the LAST TIME, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier,
but with the manifest intention of blowing up
the structure and blowing it up from the inside (Schumacher 182)

The way he writes of his appearance on the “stage” suggests that Artaud saw his appearance as an anti-theatrical performance, as a refusal of acting:

I don’t think that the performance of a man
Bellowing and hurling abuse and throwing up his
Intestines really is a theatrical performance. (182)

⁷² This is comparable to Fritsch’s representation of Klaus Mann’s desire after the war, to “wake” people from their “lethargy”, and an aim in the tradition of the revolutionary “Total Theatre” as I discussed in Chapter One.

Andre Gide described the performance as “atrocious; painful, almost sublime at times; but also revolting and quite unbearable”, but still saw Artaud in conventional acting terms: “A madman obsessed, without a doubt; but also a prodigious actor, a ham, even a clown who remains nonetheless aware of the dramatic effect and who, deliberately, plays up his orphic frenzy” (qtd. in Schumacher 181).⁷³ Schumacher, also interprets Artaud’s performance as theatre, believing that the depression Artaud experienced afterwards was “a depression about theatre in general and his inability to change it legitimately from the inside, through a truly revolutionary production” (182).

Artaud writes of the moment when he left the stage (after three hours):

I left because I realized that the only
language I could use on an audience was to
take bombs out of my pockets and throw them
in their faces in a gesture of unmistakable
aggression (qtd. in Schumacher 183)

Artaud’s dissatisfaction with this experience, if seen in theatrical terms, perhaps mirrors Genet’s when he refused writing for the theatre in order to “throw bombs” with revolutionaries in real life. Artaud could also be seen to be returning to the impulses of the surrealists with whom he was involved initially.⁷⁴ Although, in another letter to Breton several months later, Artaud discourages revolutionary activity in real life: “Make revolutionary art but make art / Don’t start the revolution in life or you will be murdered” (Schumacher 184). Artaud appears at the end of his life to show the ambivalence towards revolution, and towards the use of theatre to refuse ‘acting’ in society, that Genet also went on to experience.

⁷³ Artaud had of course just emerged from years of incarceration in mental asylums in which he had endured electric shock therapy, which produced great physical and mental changes in him. Grotowski notes: “Artaud teaches us a lesson which none of us can refuse. . . . This lesson is his sickness. Artaud’s misfortune is that his sickness, paranoia, differed from the sickness of the times. Civilisation is sick with schizophrenia, which is a rupture between intelligence and feeling, body and soul” (91).

⁷⁴ For example, Brustein notes that the surrealists, who devoted themselves “exclusively to destroying the values of Christian civilization”, declared “the simplest Surrealist act to be the firing of a revolver into a crowded street” (365). Breton spoke in homage to Artaud in 1946, describing what he calls Artaud’s “negation” of a false life:

More than twenty years have elapsed, but I can still feel that burst of impossible hope that gave a few of us purpose and lifted us above ourselves. I am thinking of all that possessed us at that time, of that torrent that propelled us ahead of ourselves as its cascading laughter swept aside all the opposition with which we met. Each time I happen to recall – nostalgically – the surrealist rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in its dark magnificence. . . . I salute Antonin Artaud for his passionate, heroic negation of everything that causes us to be dead while alive. (Scheer 14-15)

Distraction Camp (2009) Peter Falkenberg

The 1999 Free Theatre Christchurch production of *Distraction Camp*, based on Genet's *The Balcony*, incorporated Artaudian principles into an exploration of the relationship between sexuality and power in modern society. The term "distraction camp" that Emmy Göring wields at the end of Fritsch's play to describe our modern society of the spectacle, was taken up here by Falkenberg who gives his premise for the performance as follows:

[W]hereas the experience of the concentration camp was one of scarcity and hunger, the current experience of late capitalism (following Baudrillard in *Fatal Strategies*) is one of obesity and obscenity, which ironically can be seen to lead to the same effect. Forced endlessly to consume entertainments that revolve endlessly around distractions and commodities, audiences have become like the Muselman, resigned to a way of living without meaning, obese yet starved of real nourishment. (Falkenberg, "The Theatre as Counterpublic" 2)⁷⁵

In this production the term "distraction camp" was used to refer both to capitalist society and the theatre as brothel and entertainment. Artaud in his manifesto described the bourgeois theatre precisely as "a means of popular distraction" (76). The underlying comparison of modern society with the theatricality of fascism was resonant throughout *Distraction Camp* and explored explicitly at the end.

Falkenberg selected from Genet's text only the three role-play scenes within the brothel from the first half of the play.⁷⁶ By eliminating the scenes of the revolution outside of

⁷⁵ In her PhD dissertation "A genealogy of spectacle: Fascism, consumerism and the mimetic body", Melissa Ragona notes the way, "both ideological systems – fascism and capitalism – have been indicted as generators of a certain kind of disassembling simulacral culture, where aesthetics and politics are said to converge" (Ragona 29).

⁷⁶ Victor Garcia was perhaps the first to engage with an Artaudian treatment of Genet's work, starting with *The Maids*, which Genet was delighted by (White 595). Genet also attended a performance of Garcia's production of *The Balcony* in Sao Paulo 1969-72 (622). Genet was in general extremely unhappy with the productions of *The Balcony*, including its 1957 premiere in London directed by Peter Zadek, about which he stated: "I have been betrayed" (White 481). Gene Plunka explains that:

Genet was appalled by the bastardization of his play. . . . Genet demanded that the production be halted and agreed to remain in London for ten days to reshape the play. When Zadek refused the request, Genet planted himself in the center of the stage and sent out for sandwiches. To prevent any further disturbances, Zadek, who made some token revisions but refused to rework portions of the play, supported theater producer Campbell Williams's court injunction that barred Genet from attending future performances. ("Le Balcon (The Balcony)" 190-1)

This exchange could be seen as an ironic reflection of the action within the play itself, where the revolutionaries fight to take control of the brothel (theatre). Genet's translator, Bernard Frechtman, is reported to have said during the dress rehearsal in which they were both ordered to leave: "[The scenes in the brothel] should be presented with the solemnity of a Mass in a most beautiful cathedral. Mr Zadek has transformed it into just an ordinary brothel" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 180). Genet said: "Mr. Zadek is an imbecile. He has introduced a sensational element into the play. There is no nobility about Mr. Zadek's brothel. It is vulgar,

the brothel (a choice also made by Schechner and, as Plunka notes, by directors before him such as José Quintero and Antoine Bourseiller), the production developed further and more deliberately the idea of the theatre as brothel.⁷⁷ In limiting the action of the play to within the brothel itself, the theatre in which the production was performed (Free Theatre, Christchurch Arts Centre) literally embodied this idea of the “house of illusions” or “distraction camp” in which the sexual entertainments took place. This was emphasised for example by the red velvet curtains of the set extending out from the stage to drape over the walls of the auditorium, enabling a use of the space in Artaudian terms: “[I]n the ‘*theatre of cruelty*’ the spectator is in the center and the spectacle surrounds him” (Artaud 81).⁷⁸ The revolution within Genet’s play was therefore transferred to inhabit the space outside the theatre in which *Distraction Camp* was performed - the city of Christchurch, New Zealand.

This use of the theatrical space within the context of the city in which it was performed, was emphasised throughout the performance by mounted surveillance monitors either side of the stage. These were operating before the performance began, presenting a live feed of footage of the audience as they entered the theatre, from cameras, which were placed outside it. The idea of surveillance, expressed in Genet’s play via Madame Irma’s use of a “machine” which she uses to oversee and keep control of her brothel, was therefore developed further in *Distraction Camp*. During the performance the cameras fed into the monitors, footage from the revolution outside the brothel. Via the audience’s implicated position within the ‘brothel’, the confusion of acting and living, the material of Genet’s play, was represented in the form of the theatrical experience. In the 2009 debut of *Distraction Camp* the revolution was represented by footage taken from a Free Theatre theatrical production directed by Falkenberg that took place in the streets of Christchurch in 2000, Karl Kraus’s *Last Days of Mankind* (*Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*), where actors dressed as soldiers in army uniform performed military drills outside various local landmarks such as

cheap. The splendor is missing” (Gelb). Zadek responded by saying: “It is absurd that I should be accused of vulgarizing Genet’s play. I made its obscenities palatable for an English audience. Genet expected me to glorify his perversions. That’s not my idea of ‘The Balcony’ ” (Gelb). It would appear that the blasphemous act of equating sadomasochistic role-playing with the rituals of Catholic Mass was not fully embraced in Zadek’s production, although he praised Genet’s work highly following the scandal. See Peter Zadek, “Acts of Violence”. Other notable early directors of *The Balcony* were Léon Epp, Edwin Piscator, Peter Brook and Herbert Blau.

⁷⁷ White notes that in a 1975 version of the play Genet also “cut out almost all the scenes that take place outside the brothel” (White 480). And so Genet’s own development of the play appears to have been in this direction.

⁷⁸ Schechner also staged his production environmentally with the audience situated around the outside of the performance which took place in the centre of the Performing Garage. There were opportunities for the audience to inhabit the studios within the brothel although Schechner notes that few took up this opportunity (“Genet’s ‘The Balcony’. A 1981 Perspective on a 1979/80 Production” 88-89).

Cathedral Square and the Bridge of Remembrance. The use of footage from an environmental performance located in the streets of the city of Christchurch to represent the revolution outside of the brothel could be seen to reflect Genet's idea that the revolution is also aestheticised. In this way *Distraction Camp* also made theatrical Baudrillard's observation that: "The circuits of surveillance cameras are themselves part of the décor of simulacra" (*Simulacra and Simulations* 76).

The three scenes of sexual role-play from *The Balcony* used in *Distraction Camp* were framed by actors dancing the tango, which began and ended the performance. In addition to a gilded mirror along the back of the stage, a wooden dance floor (with a very subtle swastika decipherable in the joins of the wood) was the main feature of the set above which an ornate chandelier was suspended. The performance began by an extended sequence of the actors cleaning the dance floor in a ritualistic fashion, treating it as a fetish object, before moving on to dancing and singing various tangos.⁷⁹ The various tangos that were danced and sung by the actors throughout the performance were played by two musicians, who were incorporated into the performance in a way that Artaud prescribed: "*They* [the musicians] *will be treated as objects and as part of the set*" (95). This opening sequence lasted half an hour. Tango functioned in this way as a refusal of the acting and theatricality expected from a conventional theatrical performance.

This refusal of acting in favour of dancing could be seen in Nietzschean terms as a refusal of the Apollonian (rational, conformist, representational) in favour of the Dionysian (irrational, emancipatory, ritual). In Christian society the Dionysian impulse towards dancing and ecstasy has been considered a direct threat. Nietzsche embraced dancing for this very reason: "[W]e should consider every day lost in which we have not danced at least once" and "I would believe only in a god who could dance" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 210; 41).

Dancing could therefore be seen in *Distraction Camp* as an attempt to restore the truthful body as a refusal of the "*false*" body and a resolution of the contradiction inherent in Christian logic. In "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought", Alain Badiou claims that: "Every other spectacle (and above all, the theater) demands that the spectator invest the scene with his own desire. In this regard, dance is not a spectacle. It is not a spectacle because it cannot tolerate the desiring gaze, which, once there is dance, can only be a voyeur's gaze" (67). But dance can also be seen as intensely theatrical, especially in the case of the tango.

⁷⁹ For a link to the show-reel for *Distraction Camp* see: <http://www.freetheatre.org.nz/distraction-camp.html>.

The tango originated in the brothels of Argentina and its display of power and sexuality complements the scenes in the brothel from Genet's play that are also based on a sexual exchange between a dominant man and his receptive female counterpart, as Falkenberg explains: "[T]he tango enacts a power struggle: the man dominates, the woman submits" ("The Theatre as Counterpublic" 5). This form of tango, bound by strict rules and codes of behaviour between men and women, is a form of sexual sadomasochistic role-playing. Marta E. Savigliano describes tango as "a powerful representation of male/female courtship, stressing the tension involved in the process of seduction" (11). Seduction via role-playing is, from a Christian perspective, the embodiment of the 'evil' of acting itself and Savigliano describes tango's inherent theatricality: "Tango is a practice already ready for struggle. It knows about taking sides and risks. And it knows about accusing and whining, about making intimate confessions in public. Tango knows how to make a spectacle of its cruel destiny" (Savigliano 212). It certainly embodies the seduction and cruelty that epitomises Artaud's aims when he writes: "The theatre is a passionate overflowing / a frightful transfer of forces / from body / to body" (qtd. in Scheer 45). Tango also appears to express Baudrillard's conception of seduction as something that embraces artifice and "oscillates between two poles – that of strategy and that of animality" (Baudrillard qtd. in Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* 146). Tango, as a kind of exaggerated role-playing, complemented Genet's ritualistic theatrical scenes.

Ritual is central to both Artaud's and Genet's theatricality. It is a refusal of acting as representation or pretending "as if".⁸⁰ Ritual is what reconciles Genet's embrace of theatricality and Artaud's desire to strip theatricality away. Ritual contains both acting and action; it is both highly theatrical and efficacious, as Brustein notes: "In the manner of Artaud, Genet forges a theatre of cruelty, fashioning rites of sacrifice and exorcism" (Brustein 393). Artaud determined to create a theatre, which "does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence" and ritual is what enables him to do this (Artaud 86).⁸¹ Susan Sontag suggests: "Couldn't theatre dissolve the distinction between the truth of artifice and the truth of life? Isn't that just what the theatre as ritual seeks to do?" ("Film and Theatre" 29). In his discussion of Artaud, Herbert Blau claims that ritual is the only thing that can offer truth in a simulated society: "The ceremony we remember, as

⁸⁰ Schechner's definition of ritual in *Performance Studies* (pp. 71-72) is as something efficacious as opposed to an entertainment, which is to give pleasure, show off, pass time etc. (Crowe, *Religion in Contemporary German Drama* 17).

⁸¹ While this is also evident in Genet's theatre Cetta believes that Genet asserts "what Herbert Marcuse calls the 'order of sensuousness' over the 'order of reason' " (5).

Baudrillard says, tolerates no counterfeit, ‘unless as black magic and sacrilege, and it is thus that any confusion of signs is punished: as grave infraction of the order of things’ ” (qtd. in Scheer 81). White observes that Genet derived his ritual aesthetic from Nietzsche and incorporated Greek and Oriental theatre, church ritual and children’s play (465).

The opposing yet complicit forces within the tango are central to the ritual of sadomasochistic sexual role-playing in particular. Linda Williams in *Hard Core* discusses the attraction of sadomasochistic role-play where “the violence is depicted not as actual coercion but as a highly ritualized game in which the participants consent to play predetermined roles of dominance and submission” (Williams 18). Foucault also describes sadomasochism in theatrical terms as “an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure” (qtd. in Magilow et al 181). At the time of the performance of *Distraction Camp* in 2009, both sadomasochistic dungeons and tango dance halls were flourishing in Christchurch. These were therefore a genuine reflection of the kinds of experiences (and distractions), along with the theatre, that middle-class audiences were attracted to at the time. While sadomasochism is implied in the sexual role-playing in Genet’s play, it was explored more overtly in *Distraction Camp* for reasons I will discuss.⁸²

The prescribed and gendered rules for dancing the tango, as in sadomasochistic role-play, also allow for the possibility of refusal. Two excerpts from well-known tango films were danced by the actors during the opening sequence - a tango between two women from Julie Taymor’s *Frida* (2002) and a tango where a woman dances with three men from Sally Potter’s *The Tango Lesson* (1997). In these excerpts the traditional male/female power relationship was refused and played with, positioning the form of tango (as a prelude to the scenes from Genet’s *The Balcony*) as something conservative but with the possibility for transgression and rebellion. Although Savigliano notes that real refusal (revolution) is not the aim of tango: “Passion’s power is akin to a terrorist manoeuvre that asks for containment” (10).

The three successive role-plays in *The Balcony* have a ritualistic aspect that Genet demanded and deliberately emphasised.⁸³ In *Distraction Camp*, the way the brothel within the play was made to directly encapsulate the entire theatre space itself (unlike in

⁸² For an extended discussion of sadomasochism, including Schechner’s production of *The Balcony*, see Mick Wallis, “Stages of Sadomasochism”.

⁸³ Albert Bermel in his article “Society as a Brothel” believes Genet’s play only imitates ritual and is not ritualistic in itself (272-3). I argue that Bermel’s reading does not take into account the Artaudian potential for ritual in Genet’s theatre as expressed in the use of his text in *Distraction Camp*.

conventional theatre where “a separation occurs between audience and performers”⁸⁴) meant that the ritualistic sexual role-plays implicated the audience in a similar way to the efficacious rituals which take place in a Catholic Mass and this was emphasised by the use of candles.

In the first scene of the play between the Bishop and his penitent, Genet shows the way the church is comprised of ritual ‘acting’, which he likens to the sexual ‘acting’ that takes place in the brothel. Falkenberg directed this scene to make full use of its ritualistic potential. For example, in Genet’s text the scene begins with the Bishop talking to himself just after a young girl has finished confessing her sins (after the ‘climax’ of the role-play is over). In *Distraction Camp*, Falkenberg rewrote and directed the scene with the actors to revolve around the ritual of the role-play itself. The young girl’s (Judith’s) confession to the Bishop (the male client who has chosen to enact this fantasy) of lust for Jesus, was made the feature of the scene.⁸⁵ The more Judith declared her unholy lust for Jesus the more righteous and excited the Bishop became. The role-play was interrupted when Madame Irma stepped in and brought the scenario to an end and the actors fell out of their roles and started questioning their performances.⁸⁶ Falkenberg directed Madame Irma’s interruption to occur right before the Bishop “spilt his candle wax” onto the young girl as ‘punishment’, for the final time. As Plunka notes, throughout his text, Genet “refuses to allow these pipe dreamers and masqueraders to lose themselves in their own images as reflections in front of a mirror” (“Le Balcon (The Balcony)” 202). The acting is constantly disrupted and refused, as is the sexual consummation before the climax of the scene.

At this point in *Distraction Camp*, when the scene was interrupted, there was no clear division between the different performances displayed: the characters of the client and the prostitute; their role-playing as bishop and confessor; and the actual identities of the actors on stage. For example, Judith complained of the way the hot wax was spilt on her. Was this part of her sexual role-play as innocent girl, or was it the character Judith breaking away from her role-play in a refusal of it, or was it the actor (Coralie) herself who was burnt by the hot wax

⁸⁴ Schechner qtd. in Turner, *From Ritual To Theatre* 112.

⁸⁵ The prostitutes in each of the three scenes were given alternative names in *Distraction Camp*, all from stories in the Bible - Judith, Salome and Delilah.

⁸⁶ Lavery points out that another of Genet’s plays, *Elle*, which he wrote in the same year as *The Balcony*, also explores the theatricality of the church. In one scene in *Elle* The Pope says: “I am a mannequin. . . . Get started. Lower my arms, raise my foot, shift my neck, hold my left cheek, hold my right cheek, get me to puff out my chest, to pull out my tongue, but transform me into a Pope for fifteen million men” (*The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 62). This description of the Pope as an actor or a puppet or mannequin can be compared to films and theatre works which represent Hitler preparing to appear in front of the masses during fascism as a ham actor. For a discussion of *Elle*, see Gene A. Plunka “Reassessing Genet’s ‘Le Balcon’ ”.

from the candle. The confusions Genet plays with in his scene were given the extra layer of the actors' own identities. The Bishop in this scene (or perhaps the client playing him) suggested a refusal of acting is not possible in the brothel:

Judith: And what if my sins were real? What if I actually enjoyed all that?

The Bishop: You're mad! You didn't, did you?

Madame: No, no, no. She was only acting.

The Bishop: I'm quite aware of that. Here there's no possibility of doing evil. You live in evil. In the absence of remorse. How could you do evil? The Devil makes believe. That's how one recognises him. He's the great Actor.

Here The Bishop espoused the Christian anti-theatricalist notion of the devil as the actor incarnate, and that within a brothel (as in a theatre), which exists in the realm of "evil", any real or truthful action is impossible because evil is the norm. In *The Balcony*, Genet shows Catholic ritual as being comprised of the same theatrical (and therefore "evil") logic as acting in the brothel (and in the theatre).

Genet presents characters who act out roles within the brothel. In *Distraction Camp* there was yet another confusion of actor and role added to the performance of Genet's text, where the actors broke out of the roles they were playing and commented on them. Schechner also spoke of the importance of the actors' own biographies to the acting out of Genet's characters: "They need to confront fantasies and experiences that they would normally repress and to explore unconscious influences that have nevertheless shaped them. In rehearsals for *The Balcony*, I only selected actors who were willing to do that" (qtd. in Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova 218). Engagement with the actors as part of the performance of Genet's text, was also hinted at by Herbert Blau, after his own experience directing *The Balcony* in 1963. He observed that the actors who play the characters may refuse their roles out of suspicion as to the way Genet is using them: "The actor resists his scenario, and should. The drama gains intensity of meaning from encouragement of the actor's natural grievances" (268). In this way *Distraction Camp* developed further the logic that existed already in Genet's text. Sartre also noted the way Genet's actors "play what they are" (615).

After the interruption to his role-play, the client playing the Bishop went over to face the mirror that ran the length of the back wall of the theatre. When he looked into it he could see himself and the audience who again could see him and themselves through the mirror: "Now answer, mirror, answer me. Why do I come here...?" The client proceeded to examine why he came to this house of illusions: as voyeur, or for distraction, or to escape from everyday reality, or for self-knowledge? He pointed out the hypocrisy of Christianity, which depends on evil for its own existence:

The Bishop: Do you enjoy this, God? – watching us sin, while you remain righteous in your sinless perfection? Even indignant and outraged? We are *your* House of Illusions; you and your followers are the perverts, and we fulfil your desires. You sin *through* us, and we take the punishment for these sins upon ourselves.

In speaking his monologue towards the mirror along the back of the brothel, the client spoke simultaneously to himself, himself in his role as The Bishop, to God, and also to the audience who he could see in the mirror. In the theatrical context of *Distraction Camp*, the actor (dancer) delivering the monologue also revealed himself. The text for this monologue was modeled on a speech from Genet's text but was developed further by director and actor who also added self-flagellation to his questioning of himself (another element of 'real' and not acted pain or cruelty).⁸⁷ The audience who could see themselves in the mirror were likewise also positioned both in the righteous position of God, and in the position of the client who had come to the brothel just as the audience had perhaps come to the theatre. Genet points out that in the brothel (theatre) where an audience comes to worship great acting, it is the Devil who they desire to commune with. The client in this scene (in an adaptation of Genet's text) decided to leave the brothel (theatre): "It's time to join the rebellion. It feels like my only chance to be alive, to be free!" He refuses acting, but there is no out out there, not even in the audience because the audience only mirrors in their desires the "evil" he wants to escape from.

Both Artaud and Genet expose and play with the hypocrisy in bourgeois society that condemns "evil" while basking in it at the same time. Augustine was also aware of this contradiction in his admiration for actors on the stage where "both admirer and admired share the same nature. Can I, then, love in another what I should hate in myself, though both of us are human?" (Augustine 84). The client's desire at the end of this scene to refuse the "evil" world of acting in the brothel and be "free" in the real world of the revolution is constantly undermined in the play. Cetta describes the way Genet embraces "evil" as "a negation of the good, pure, bourgeois, 'real' world" (7). In an interview Genet stated: "A rebel struggles against evil in the name of good. He is the defender of society. I immerse myself in evil" (Genet qtd. in White 412). Sartre describes Genet's fascination with evil: "[W]hat one desires and refuses at the same time is Evil, is it not?" (355). It is clear that Genet was inspired in this direction by Nietzsche: "I understand theatre exactly as he does. . . . What I liked is that his

⁸⁷ This role was played by Ryan Reynolds, the same actor who played Gründgens in *Faust Chroma*. And in this role in *Distraction Camp* he asked similar questions of his character. As an actress in *Distraction Camp*, I also became aware of the way in which as actors and actresses we took the sins (desires) of the audiences "upon ourselves".

ideas suit me: beyond good and evil: the superman. Not, obviously, the superman of Hitler and Goering” (qtd. in White 528). Lavery observes that Genet used “evil” as Artaud used the plague: “Anticipating the thought of a later generation of post-structuralist playwrights from Jacques Derrida to Alain Badiou, ‘evil’, for Genet, is a prerequisite for changing consciousness” (“Between Negativity and Resistance” 226).

Genet refers to evil in much of his writing. For example, in *The Thief's Journal* (*Journal du voleur*, 1949) he writes: “It would seem logical to pray to the devil” (Brustein 385). He flirted with the ‘evil’ of fascism in particular.⁸⁸ White notes the way that in his fiction, Genet “esteemed Hitler precisely as the devil incarnate” (144). In a passage from his autobiographical *Funeral Rites* (*Pompes funèbres*, 1948), Genet’s protagonist describes his experience being seduced by Hitler during a rally, describing him as an actor:

I was able. . . to delegate my powers to the famous actor in Nuremberg who was playing the role in which I was prompting him from my room or from my place beside the coffin. He was strutting, he was gesticulating and roaring before a crowd of spellbound, raving Storm Troopers who were thrilled to feel that they were the necessary extras in a performance that was taking place in the street. Actually it's hardly possible for a theatrical service to take place in daily life and make the simplest acts participate in that service, but one can realize the beauty of those performances before a hundred thousand spectator-actors when one knows that the sublime officiant was Hitler playing the role of Hitler. He was representing me. (55)

This idea that Genet sees Hitler as an actor and that his “performance” is a projection of a desire that exists in Genet himself, is expressed in the mirrored relationships Genet sets up in *The Balcony* between the audience and the actors, and between the characters themselves who are always seeing something of themselves in each other.⁸⁹ This mirrored complicity is expressed similarly by Artaud in his 1926 manifesto for the Alfred Jarry theatre when he describes the spectacle of a police raid on a brothel as an example of ideal theatre: “For surely we are just as guilty as these women and just as cruel as these policemen. It is really a complete spectacle” (qtd. in Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* 156).

⁸⁸ Genet wrote of his particular fascination with Nazi Germany: “Only the German police, in Hitler’s time succeeded in being both Police and Crime. This masterly synthesis of opposites, this block of truth, was frightful, charged with a magnetism that will continue to perturb us for a long, long time” (*The Thief's Journal* 157).

⁸⁹ The staging of the client who upon finishing his role-playing of The Bishop looked into the mirror, contained echoes of a passage in *Funeral Rites* where the protagonist looks in the mirror and sees himself in both his own image and Hitler’s: “I was looking at myself in the wardrobe mirror of my hotel room. The picture of the Führer on the mantelpiece behind me was reflected in the glass. I was stripped to the waist and wearing my wide black breeches, which were tight at the ankles. I was looking at myself, staring into my own eyes, then staring at the Führer's image in the mirror” (49).

Genet's radical politics, his refusal to be defined by conventional notions of a left-wing revolutionary, and his play with fiction in his autobiographical writing, has meant that some have defined him as a fascist. Harry E. Stewart and Rob Roy McGregor, write that Genet "combines the most inhumane and antisocial aspects of fascism with his own whimsies, lusts, and fantasies in order to inflict an erotic vengeance upon that society which rejected and humiliated him from early youth, each episode compounding his pleasure into a paroxysm of joy" (Stewart and McGregor 89). They believe that ritual spectacle was an important part of Genet's attraction to fascism: "Hitler's adept use of symbols, pageantry, ceremonials and rituals is well known. Certainly Genet's susceptibility to the mystical elements of Hitler's reign was a factor in his gravitation towards fascism" (31).⁹⁰

Artaud also wrote in terms of evil when he described theatre as "an exorcism to make our demons FLOW" (60). He believed in the symbiotic relationship between good and evil in Christian society: "Good is always upon the outer face, but the face within is evil" (104). As a result, and like Genet, several critics have suggested Artaud was fascist.⁹¹ Brustein however, believes that, like Genet, Artaud shared an affinity with Nietzsche in his rejection of Christianity as a quest for truth: "Like the messianic Nietzsche, the messianic Artaud is concerned with the rediscovery of man, and seeks his metaphysical remains under the rubble of two thousand years of Christianity" (371).

The second scene from Genet's play, which was replayed in *Distraction Camp*, was between a client playing the Judge and a prostitute playing the Thief. The role-play consisted of a thief being judged for an array of items she has stolen. As Plunka explains, in regards to *The Balcony*, the Judge "gratifies his sadomasochistic urges by reversing the roles, groveling

⁹⁰ The way the spectacle of the Catholic Mass is comprised of ritual acting, and what it therefore has in common with the spectacle of fascism, has been widely discussed. Erika Fischer-Lichte discusses the *Thingspiel* movement during the rise of fascism, for which giant theatrical arenas like those of the Ancient Greeks were planned as a revolutionary theatre where ritual would be used to "trigger quasi-religious feelings, to be directed towards the nation, towards the fatherland" (126). Günter Berghaus also discusses the connection fascist spectacle had to religious ritual in *Fascism and Theatre* (1996) quoting Albert Speer, Hitler's favoured architect, who describes Hitler's spectacles which "were almost like rites of the founding of a Church" in which Hitler had the status of a "founder of a religion" (Speer qtd. in 53 Berghaus). Berghaus describes the function of these fascist rites: "Submersion in mass emotions (ecstatic possession) complemented the charisma (fascination) of the leader. . . . Here, in the mass, the weak felt strong and they submitted to the strongest, the leader, who in return, found his confirmation through this contact with the masses. The cathartic experience bound the individual to the crowd (the fascist mass movement) and to the leader figure, who seemingly enabled the individual to overcome the fears and anxieties provoked by the crisis" (48-9). In an article on Italian fascism George Mosse explores fascism's aesthetic in religious terms: "The aesthetic of fascism should be put into the framework of fascism as a civic religion, as a non-traditional faith which used liturgy and symbols to make its belief come alive" (Mosse 245). Carlston also compares fascism and Catholicism "as ideologies that fulfill the aesthete's craving for form, spectacle, and the unattainable ideal" (Carlston in *Thinking Fascism* 62).

⁹¹ See Naomi Green, "All the Great Myths are Dark" in Plunka's *Antonin Artaud and the Modern Theater* (1994). Stephen Barber notes that Artaud dedicated a copy of his book *The New Revelations of Being* to Hitler and that Artaud claimed to have had an argument with him in 1932 at the Romanisches Café in Berlin (111; 51).

at the Thief's feet and licking her shoes" ("Le Balcon (The Balcony)" 200). As in the scene with the Bishop, in *Distraction Camp*, this role-play was directed by Falkenberg to revolve around the ritual of the judgement itself. In this scene there was a third character, the role of the Executioner who whipped the Thief as punishment for the added gratification of the Judge. The two giant television monitors situated on either side of the stage, revealed close-up footage of the scene, which was filmed by another prostitute in the brothel, and projected via a live video link. This drew attention to, and functioned to provide the audience and perhaps the Judge himself, with voyeuristic details of the action.

In this scene, the sadomasochistic acting was directly connected to the way power is maintained by authority figures in real life. The Judge clarifies the Thief's role clearly: "[Y]ou've got to be a model thief if I'm to be a model judge. If you're a fake thief, I become a fake judge. Is that clear?" What this suggested is that the same may apply in real life – that judges and thieves act roles in order to confirm their own and each other's existence. And this sadomasochistic logic was directly connected to Christian ideology by the client role-playing the Judge: "The world is an apple. I cut it in two: the good, the bad. And you agree, thank you, you agree to be the bad!"⁹² In the logic of the brothel, as in Christian society, it is women who "agree to be the bad" (along with homosexuals, blacks, Jews, or the underclass). In *Distraction Camp*, extra text was added including direct quotes from Sartre's *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (and from local politician Michael Laws):

The Judge: Evil is a projection. As for the evildoer – *she* is someone whose situation makes it possible for her to present to us in broad daylight the obscure temptations of our freedom. The enemy is our twin sister, our image in the mirror. She is very carefully recruited – must be bad by birth and without hope of change. The Underclass. Children of beneficiaries, drug addicts, criminals have little chance in life. But they are necessary. They shouldn't be sterilized. Without them there would be no crime, therefore there could be no judges, there would be no justice.⁹³

A refusal of acting (or the threat of it) was used to show up the perversity of this sadomasochistic logic in real life where authority figures are dependent upon and desire the very "evil" they set themselves against:

The Judge: My being a judge is an emanation of your being a thief. You need only refuse – but you'd better not! – need only refuse to be who you are – what you are, therefore who you are – for me to cease to be... to vanish. What

⁹² This echoes Nietzsche in *Human, All-Too-Human: A Book for Free Spirits (Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister, 1878)* when he writes: "Good actions are sublimated evil ones; evil actions are vulgarized and stupefied good ones" (108).

⁹³ The excerpts from Sartre's *Saint Genet* that were used in this scene and also by Madame Irma at the end of the performance, were taken from Sartre's discussion of "evil" in the chapter titled "The Metamorphosis".

then? What then? But you won't refuse, will you? You won't refuse to be a thief. That would be wicked. It would be criminal. You'd deprive me of being! (*imploringly*) Say it, my child, my love, you won't refuse?

The similarities that exist between the spectacle of fascism and modern society (the concept of modern society as a "distraction camp" - a modern day version and reversal of the "concentration camp") were pointed out more directly in the last half of the performance, and sadomasochistic theatricality was central to this. In her article "Fascinating Fascism" (1974) Sontag discusses the emergence of Nazi aesthetics as a subject of sadomasochistic eroticism:

In pornographic literature, films, and gadgetry throughout the world, especially in the United States, England, France, Scandinavia, Holland, and Germany, the SS has become a reference of sexual adventurism. . . . More or less Nazi costumes with boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, have become, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism. ("Fascinating Fascism")

Sontag points out that one of the legacies the spectacle of fascism has left is its feature in the sadomasochistic role-play and sexual fantasies of Western society. She writes:

"sadomasochistic sexuality is more theatrical than any other [sexuality]. When sexuality depends so much on its being 'staged,' sex (like politics) becomes choreography" ("Fascinating Fascism"). Falkenberg explains his logic for bringing together precisely these three things (sex, politics and choreography) in *Distraction Camp*: "Tango works like the brothel and like fascism through and with the dialectics of power and submission, sadism and masochism, brutality and sentimentality" (Falkenberg, "The Theatre as Counterpublic" 5).⁹⁴

Helga Finter's discussion of the sensory aspect in Artaudian theatre goes some way towards explaining the need for sadomasochistic role-play in contemporary western society: "In the age of simulation and simulacra, being touched appears to be conceivable only as a physical touch; only the provocation of actual danger and actual corporeal pain seems capable of giving meaning or sense, and thereby sensation, to existence" (qtd. in Scheer 50). The Nazis, as the proponent of some of the worst and most violent atrocities in recent history, appear to provide the stimulus for this need.⁹⁵ Finter describes the way Artaud sought "to make audible and visible what the seduction exercised by the Nazi-fascistic political theatre first made possible – the denial of the Other, the heterogenous, and its projection onto others"

⁹⁴ The notion that sentimentality is the other side of brutality, was noted by Franz Grillparzer and Carl Jung. Falkenberg introduced this concept early on in rehearsals as an interpretation of the sadomasochistic nature of the role-playing in Genet's text and in the tango.

⁹⁵ Sadomasochism was hinted at in Klaus Mann's and Szabò's fictional retelling of Gründgens' life during fascism in Höfgen's sadomasochistic sexual relationship with a black woman.

(qtd. in Scheer 56). Benjamin also discussed fascism in sadomasochistic terms, emphasising its ritual nature: “The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values” (Benjamin 680). Even Hitler described the masses in sadomasochistic relation to himself, when (like Nietzsche) he likened them to a woman:

Like the woman, whose psychic state is determined less by grounds of abstract reason than by an indefinable emotional longing for a force which will complement her nature, and who, consequently, would rather bow to a strong man than dominate a weakling, likewise the masses love a commander. (42)⁹⁶

Hitler took full advantage, in his many rallies and speeches, of the masses’ desire for powerful leadership. As Sontag observes: “Like Nietzsche and Wagner, Hitler regarded leadership as sexual mastery of the ‘feminine’ masses, as rape. The expression of the crowds in *Triumph of the Will* is one of ecstasy. The leader makes the crowds come” (“Fascinating Fascism”).

This connection between fascism and sadomasochistic role-play became clearer in the third scene from Genet’s play between the General and his ‘horse’ (played by a female prostitute). In *Distraction Camp* the General was renamed the Camp Commandant and wore a black leather trench coat (the trademark of the SS and part of the sadomasochistic aesthetic Sontag describes). Sontag notes: “[T]he SS seems to be the most perfect incarnation of fascism in its overt assertion of the righteousness of violence, the right to have total power over others and to treat them as absolutely inferior” (“Fascinating Fascism”). In this scene, the sadomasochistic element that was inherent in all three of the role-plays became more explicit. For example, props such as a whip, ball gag and body harness were used as fetish objects that stood in for riding regalia.

Klaus Theweleit in his 1987 and 1989 double volume work *Male Fantasies* (*Männerphantasien*), examines from a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective, the desires inherent in the creation of a fascist ideology:

[F]ascism translates internal states into massive, external monuments or ornaments as a canalization system, which large numbers of people flow into; where their desire can flow, at least within (monumentally enlarged) preordained channels; where they can discover that they are not split off and isolated, but that they are sharing the violation of prohibitions with so many others (preferably with all others). (431)

⁹⁶ Of course, as an ‘actor’ himself, in Nietzschean terms, Hitler can also be seen in the feminine position.

Theweleit specifically points to the theatricality of these desires: “All of that affirmation is theatrical; it never gets beyond representation, the illusion of production” (432). Like Genet and Debord and others, Theweleit states clearly that the desires expressed in this false spectacle become ‘reality’, and must be refused because of it:

We need to understand and combat fascism not because so many fell victim to it, not because it stands in the way of the triumph of socialism, not even because it might ‘return again’, but primarily because, as a form of reality production that is constantly present and possible under determinate conditions, *it can and does, become our production*. (221)

Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*L’Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, 1972), also attempted to understand how the desire for fascism was created: “[T]he masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they *wanted* fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for” (29).⁹⁷ Theweleit notes that “Deleuze and Guattari are probably right when they suggest in passing that Hitler enabled fascists to have an erection” (430). Martin Esslin believes that Deleuze and Guattari were inspired by Artaud’s case history in their analysis of modern society, that is,

polarized between the capitalist-Fascist attitude, gregarious, rejoicing in large numbers and participation in a superior race or nation, which corresponds to the clinical picture of *paranoia* on the one hand; and on the other, the revolutionary attitude, which is that of an isolated, despised outcast, cut off from the crowd, withdrawing into his self which presents the phenotype of *schizophrenia*. (Esslin, *Artaud* 111)

In the preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s work, Michel Foucault, acknowledges the desire that remains entrenched in our society, for fascism, and articulates the problem of how to refuse,

not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini - which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively - but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. . . . How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behaviour? (*Foucault Live* xiii)

⁹⁷ They were influenced by Wilhelm Reich’s *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (*Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*, 1933), a psychoanalytical investigation into the link between the desire for Nazism and sexual repression.

These are precisely the kinds of questions asked in *Distraction Camp* and expressed in the sadomasochistic fantasies in Genet's play. Artaud saw the necessity of using theatre to express and engage in such "perverse possibilities" in order to find freedom:

If the essential theater is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized . . . all true freedom is dark, and infallibly identified with sexual freedom which is also dark, although we do not know precisely why. (30)

Baudrillard observes the way "fascism can again become fascinating in its filtered cruelty, aestheticized by retro" and discusses the way "the innumerable films that play on these themes for us have a closer, more perverse, denser, more confused essence" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 44).

One of these films is *The Night Porter* (1974) directed by Liliana Cavani that as Peter Schulman describes, transforms "the concentration camp itself into a theatrical space" (176). Like Sontag, Foucault suggests that the renewed fascination with Nazi aesthetics is "a re-eroticization of power, taken to a pathetic, ridiculous extreme" (*Foucault Live* 98).⁹⁸ Foucault acknowledges the way in which Nazi aesthetics are explored in Cavani's film:

[I]n [*The*] *Night Porter* the question is – both generally and in the present situation – a very important one: love for power. Power has an erotic charge. There's an historical problem involved here. How is it that Nazism – which was represented by shabby, pathetic puritanical characters, laughably Victorian old maids, or at best, smutty individuals – how has it managed to become, in France, in Germany, in the United States, in all pornographic literature throughout the world, the ultimate symbol of eroticism? Every shoddy erotic fantasy is now attributed to Nazism. (97)

A scene from *The Night Porter* when Charlotte Rampling sings and dances semi-nude in male SS clothing in a concentration camp brothel, was recreated in *Distraction Camp*. It was performed by the same actress who played the prostitute and acted as the Thief in the second role-play from Genet's play. She dances for the Camp Commandant from the third role-play, who now confirmed the connection between sadomasochism and Nazi aesthetics by donning a swastika armband and SS hat.⁹⁹ The scene in Cavani's film takes its inspiration from the story of Salome's dance for King Herod in the Bible, where she demands as reward the head

⁹⁸ Magilow, Vander Lugt and Bridges note that in post-fascist Italy the term "il sadiconazista" was used to describe the exploitation films that emerged in the 1960s uniting fascism and sadomasochism (27-28).

⁹⁹ In Cavani's film Dirk Bogarde acts as the Camp Commandant. Bogarde and Rampling starred together in an earlier film, Visconte's *The Damned* (1969), where Bogarde also plays a Nazi perpetrator and Rampling also plays a victim.

of John the Baptist. In its re-enactment in *Distraction Camp*, at the end of her dance, the prostitute (Salome) was rewarded with the head of the Executioner, who was played by her fellow prostitute in scene two. In Cavani's film the brothel exists inside a concentration camp in Nazi Germany. In its recreation in *Distraction Camp*, the brothel in the film was now represented by the 'brothel' (theatre) in which the performance of *Distraction Camp* took place, which situated Christchurch in 2009 as the concentration (or distraction) camp itself.

This idea was taken up explicitly at the end of the performance. In this ending, Madame Irma turned to address the audience, giving what was a significantly modified version of the last speech in Genet's play, using excerpts from other parts of the play, from Sartre's *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* and inserting direct references to fascism:

Madame Irma: It's human nature to wish to divide the world into the good and the bad. It's so simple. But whom does one hate in the person of the dirty, greedy, sensual whore? Just the same as in the 'dirty, greedy, sensual Jew.' One's own self, one's own greed, one's own lechery. And what does one hate in the person of the sadistic SS officer? Again, one's own self, one's own cruelty, one's own brutality. Evil men are as necessary to good men as whores are to decent women. Good girls or bad girls? You're working girls, that's all. It was I who decided to call my establishment a house of illusions, but I'm only the manager. Each individual, when he rings the bell and enters, brings his own scenario, perfectly thought out. My job is merely to rent the theatre and furnish the props, actors and actresses.

Throughout her speech rioters appeared on the surveillance monitors on the stage. But this time the protest was happening outside the theatre in which the performance was taking place, just like the revolutionaries who protest outside the brothel in Genet's play. The noise of protesting started to increase. This was followed by a loud and violent hammering on the door directly behind the audience and through which they had entered the theatre. Some audience members were extremely startled by this. This meeting of the world of the revolution, which was until this moment positioned outside of the theatrical frame, and the world of simulation within the brothel, functioned as an unsettling reminder of the audience's role in the performance (and perhaps in society) as customers in the 'brothel'. Madame Irma responded to the hammering:

Madame Irma: Who's there? What do they want? Freedom? From the Distraction Camp? Shut them out! Lock the doors. Switch off the monitors. (*claps hands*) Let's dance.

The actors on stage started dancing, inviting the audience up to dance with them, ending the performance.

This ending contained multiple readings. The audience whose ‘acts’ and desires had been mirrored on the stage throughout the performance were now seduced into becoming actors on the stage themselves. In refusing to let her brothel be liberated by the revolutionaries, Madame Irma suggested the audience’s complicity in the fantasies of power and seduction enacted in the ‘brothel’.¹⁰⁰ As Falkenberg describes it, the audience was “entering fully into the House of Illusions, the fascist brothel, and all that implies” (“The Theatre as Counterpublic” 5). As in Genet’s play, the revolution outside the brothel was defeated or at least ignored, and the explosive potential of revolutionary desire in the scenes from Genet’s play were contained through dancing the tango.¹⁰¹

Alternatively, the dancing in the brothel at the end of the performance could be seen to offer a space of “freedom” in Madame Irma’s terms as sadomasochistic role-play and tango both come with the possibility of refusal. The liberating possibilities of the ending to the performance (as it returned to the tango in the way it began) can be read in Artaudian terms, especially in the dissolving of the theatrical space to include the audience. This was when Dionysian ritual (however restrained in Badiou’s terms) became possible via dancing the tango in a shared communion with the audience. Brustein discusses the Theatre of Cruelty’s Dionysian function: “Artaud’s theatre, in short, is designed to have the function of a Dionysian revel, a Bacchanal, a sacrificial rite – relieving the spectator of all the wildness, fierceness, and joy which civilization has made him repress” (Artaud qtd. in Brustein 368). Dance was on Artaud’s mind at the end of his life when he contemplated the failure of his writings on the theatre to have become reality. In his essay on Artaud, Derrida begins with a quote from Artaud’s last writings published before his death, where he discusses dance as the precursor to theatre:

...Dance
and consequently the theater
have not yet begun to exist. (qtd. in Derrida 232)

Falkenberg quotes Baudrillard to describe the emancipatory possibility of the ending, writing

¹⁰⁰ Seduction into simulacrum via dancing is indicated partway through Genet’s text at the end of a scene where Rosine, one of the prostitutes, is successful in seducing the client who played the Bishop back into his costume to play it for real on the balcony. He says: “I am not living, I am dancing...” She replies: “Dance, little Bishop, dance... come along... dance” (71).

¹⁰¹ 2009 was around the time of the Occupy Movement protests, which took place in cities around the world including Christchurch and were followed by the Arab Spring in 2010. With the exception of a few of the uprisings in the Arab world, the protests in the West were failed attempts at revolution. Lavery discusses the non-revolutionary potential of the ritual within Genet’s play: “If Irma’s brothel is, to all extent and purposes, a drama studio, then her clients and staff are actors, constrained to perform on what Artaud would reject as a ‘theological stage’, a stage dominated by an author-God and condemned, in advance, to repetition” (Lavery, *The Politics of Jean Genet’s Late Theatre* 129).

that, while in dancing with the actors, the audience “join the systems of simulation”, and that this may be necessary in order to transform society (qtd. in Falkenberg, “The Theatre as Counterpublic” 5). Likewise, for the actors, dancing with the audience contained these dual possibilities where “theatre goes down into the street and into everydayness; it claims to invest the whole of the real, dissolve into it, and at the same time trans-figure it” (Baudrillard qtd. in Falkenberg, “The Theatre as Counterpublic” 7).

The ending to *Distraction Camp* was intentionally ambiguous in the same way as the acting in Genet’s brothel has the potential to be both liberating and oppressive. While shutting out the possibility of revolution in her final words, at the same time, Madame Irma also attacks the (simulated) society that the revolutionaries are a part of when she uses the term “distraction camp” along with “house of illusions” to refer not to her brothel (as it stands in for a debauched concentration camp), but to the society outside of the brothel (theatre) – to the ‘real’ life Christchurch itself.¹⁰² Falkenberg made it clear in an email to the collaborators during the creation of the performance that it should not be easily determined in the performance where the “distraction camp” begins or ends:

The Church, the Military, the Law are traditionally the agents of the sup(op)pression of desire. In Genet’s Brothel the role playing of power and authority become sado-masochistic games of the oppression of desire and freedom (perhaps like the Kapos in a concentration camp). The question we may ask is, if this is still the case or if the emasculation of these authorities has made our society into a soft porn brothel with no out out there, with no revolution possible any longer, but one of enforcing the oppressive rules again and more radically (like for example in the Islamic Jihad). (Falkenberg, “Distraction Camp”)

In exploring the complexities of revolution but with a desire to refuse a false life, I argue that the performance of *Distraction Camp*, like Genet’s play, contained revolutionary potential. Falkenberg uses Baudrillard’s concept of seduction to describe the revolutionary potential of performance in a simulated society: “In order for Revolution to come, it has to seduce us...” (Baudrillard in *Fatal Strategies*, qtd. in Falkenberg, “The Theatre as Counterpublic” 7). This is surely part of the reason the status quo is so violently resistant to revolution - because anything seductive is dangerous like the devil.

In *Distraction Camp*, as in the bible (and as I discussed in my Introduction), the devil is most seductive when disguised as a woman. The anti-theatricalists’ association of women

¹⁰² As I began by discussing, this is the same criticism Emmy slings at her audience at the end of Fritsch’s *Enigma Emmy Göring*. It also encapsulates the intentions behind the often quoted final lines in Genet’s play where Madame Irma says to the audience: “You must go home, now – and you can be quite sure that nothing there will be any more real than it is here...” (96).

with the devil who acts and seduces, is reflected in the representations of Salome, the character of Lucia in Cavani's film, and the character of Salome restaging Lucia's dance in *Distraction Camp* and deliberately pointed to in each of the three scenes from *The Balcony*. A quote from Nietzsche was added to the text in *Distraction Camp* when the Camp Commandant said to Madame Irma: "Women. That's all you are, actresses. Even when you're taking everything off, you're putting something on".¹⁰³

In the 20th century feminists began to engage with the desire to refuse the acting roles available to women (in theatre and film and in life), and to embrace 'acting' in life as a truthful and liberating reality for women. Simone de Beauvoir famously suggested in *The Second Sex* (1949) that gender is a product of social conditions, something that is learnt and constructed: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Judith Butler took this idea further by discussing gender explicitly as something that is performed. She contends that gender is "an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative" and that "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. . . . In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*" (*Gender Trouble* 177; 178). In doing so she suggests that it is impossible to refuse this 'acting' because to 'act' and construct ourselves as women (or men) is our only reality.¹⁰⁴ Other feminists such as Peggy Phelan have described women's relationship to our bodies in similar terms: "Uncertain about what this body looks like or how substantial it is, we perform an image of it by imitating what we think we look like. We imagine what people might see when they look at us, and then we try to perform (and conform to) those images" (36).

In an interview with Schechner about his production of *The Balcony*, Lavery suggested to him that Genet has more in common with Judith Butler than with Goffman (Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova 214). Schechner replied: "You're probably right. Where Goffman sees the world as a stage where an actor enters, exits and then goes home, Butler stresses the never-ending aspects of performance. For her, there is no offstage area, identity itself is a performance. Performance is what produces you, and that certainly describes what's happening in *The Balcony*" (qtd. in Finburgh et al 214). Schechner also put it another

¹⁰³ This was a slight paraphrasing from Nietzsche's original text. See my Introduction pp. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Schechner's production of *The Balcony* illustrated this idea theatrically, where Madame Irma was played by a male actor, who throughout the play transformed from a man into a "Queen": "[S]tep by step, scene by scene, he made himself up into a Queen in both senses: royalty in drag" ("Genet's 'The Balcony'. A 1981 Perspective on a 1979/80 Production" 85). Cetta believes Irma is Genet himself in 'drag' "for she speaks with his voice" (Cetta 47).

way saying: “We no longer go to the theatre to see ourselves stripped bare. Rather, we go to see ourselves as performers” (qtd. in Finburgh et al 214). Here, both Lavery and Schechner suggest that Goffman, like Artaud, believes that acting in life masks or prevents a more truthful reality.

However, this is a misreading of Goffman who in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* discusses the authentic “self” explicitly as something created through performance.¹⁰⁵ Like Butler, Goffman embraces the logic of late Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* where, in spite of his earlier claims to the contrary, Nietzsche appears to also head towards an acknowledgment that there may be no essential truth behind the performance of gender. Butler uses a quote from this work where Nietzsche explains, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (Nietzsche qtd. in *Gender Trouble* 33). It may be that the fears he expressed in *The Gay Science* – that what happened in Ancient Greek society was occurring in his own (where “role has actually become character; and art, nature”) – became increasingly evident to him. If the action of pretending something in life is equivalent to a real “becoming”, and if there is nothing else, then many of his earlier arguments against acting fall apart.

In her book about Nietzsche, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche (Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche, 1980)*, Luce Irigaray also acknowledges the inherent theatricality of femininity that early Nietzsche and the anti-theatricalists despised. She takes issue with Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft, 1886)*, where he wrote that “nothing is more foreign... to woman than truth” and “her great art is falsehood, her chief concern is appearance and beauty” (Nietzsche qtd. in Irigaray 77). Irigaray responds: “Neither falsehood nor appearance and beauty are ‘foreign’ to truth. They are proper to it, if not its accessories and its underside” (77). While Irigaray may consider gender from an essentialist perspective, rather than from Butler and de Beauvoir’s more constructivist perspective, they are alike in their belief in the ‘truthfulness’ of the theatricality inherent in femininity: “Finally women, who of course are actresses. In order to please. But without any qualities of their own” (82). Here Irigaray points out the way women often ‘act’ for the benefit of others (men). And despite Nietzsche’s belief that women are the liars and pretenders, and then by implication that men are truthful, he does let slip in

¹⁰⁵ For an analysis of Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* in relation to Genet’s *The Balcony*, see Gary Backhaus’ “The Hidden Realities of the Everyday Life-World in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Genet’s *The Balcony*” and Dina Sherzer’s “Frames and Metacommunication in Genet’s *The Balcony*”.

The Gay Science that women have modelled themselves on an ideal that man created for them: “For it is man who creates for himself the image of woman and woman forms herself according to this image” (126).

Hélène Cixous discusses women’s relationship to acting in “Going to the Seaside” (“Aller à La Mer”, 1977).¹⁰⁶ In this essay she begins by asking: “How, as women, can we go to the theatre without lending our complicity to the sadism directed against women, or being asked to assume, in the patriarchal family structure that the theatre reproduces *ad infinitum*, the position of victim?” (546). Here Cixous criticises the way the representation of women in the theatre as victims, functions as a model for women to imitate in life. Her suggestion is that what should be restored to actresses in the theatre is “the living, breathing, speaking body” (547). In other words, a (Dionysian) body that is not separated from the mind. She continues: “If the stage is woman, it will mean ridding this space of theatricality. . . . [and] everything that makes for ‘staginess’ ” (547). In this way she sees from a feminist perspective what Artaud also wanted restored to the theatre. She demands a refusal of the falseness and theatricality that alienates women from their bodies in the theatre and in life. As she puts it in her earlier essay about writing “The Laugh of the Medusa”:

To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. . . . A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. (880)

De Beauvoir also recognised the way some women choose to exhibit themselves by acting on the stage as an activity to compensate for their lack of ability or willingness to ‘act’ as a subject in life – which by definition would involve an active resistance and refusal of the male order: “For lack of action, woman invents substitutes for action; to some the theatre represents a favoured substitute” (647).

In *The Balcony*, Genet exposes the roles available to women in society.¹⁰⁷ However, the female characters in his play do not necessarily desire to refuse these roles. They are as complicit as the men are within the logic of the brothel. In *Distraction Camp*, after her performance of the song from *The Night Porter*, the prostitute Salome complained to

¹⁰⁶ An alternative translation is “Going to the Mother”.

¹⁰⁷ This is observed by Kate Millett in her discussion of *The Balcony* in *Sexual Politics* (1969), where she views the representation of sexuality within it, as “the nuclear model of all the more elaborate social constructs growing out of it” and which is “not only hopelessly tainted but the very prototype of institutional inequality” (20).

Madame Irma: “When our sessions are over, you never allow anyone to talk about them. You observe it all from a distance. You have no idea how we really feel. I want to be a good girl, not a bad girl”. Madame Irma replied: “There are no good girls, just good actors”.¹⁰⁸ While Salome was dissatisfied with her role within the brothel, she could not desire beyond the Christian dichotomy of good and evil. When Madame Irma suggested that identity is created through acting and that good girls don’t inherently exist, this may not have been the reality Salome wanted to acknowledge. Esslin notes the way that in Genet’s text, the character of Chantal similarly does not escape this binary: “Chantal, who escaped from Madame Irma’s brothel because she could not bear prostituting herself for the fantasies of impotent little men trying to partake of the feeling of power and sexual potency, is inevitably turned into an object of myth, a sexual image designed to lure the cannon fodder of the revolution to its death” (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 186). Plunka notes: “In their use of Chantal as an object or whore, the rebels become the equivalent of brothel patrons who abuse prostitutes to satisfy their sexual whims and desires” (Plunka, “Le Balcon (The Balcony)” 206). The co-dependent notions of good and evil are reflected in the roles available to women as either mother/virgin or whore.

Theweleit writes of the absurdity of these dichotomous roles available to women during fascism, where “Women who don’t conform to any of the ‘good women’ images are automatically seen as prostitutes, as the vehicles of ‘urges’ ” (171). He continues:

The threat posed by women is so great that it is an inadequate defense merely to divide them into two components, an asexual-nurturing one and an erotic-threatening one. The threatening element has to be annihilated as well. Even the ‘good’ component doesn’t escape unharmed. Whereas the ‘evil’ woman is beaten and killed, the ‘good’ woman is robbed of life, rendered lifeless. The affective mode of self-defense in which this occurs seems to be made up of fear and desire. (183)

Theweleit describes in Marxist terms what results from such male-female relations (which he sees as theatrical) suggesting that the fascist reality they create, exists just as much now (he wrote in 1977) as it did during fascism: “Under certain conditions, this particular relation of production yields fascist reality; it creates life-destroying structures. I think that has become apparent, just as it becomes apparent that fascism is a current reality whenever we try to establish what kinds of reality present-day male-female relations produce” (221).

¹⁰⁸ The first part of Salome’s text was taken from earlier in Genet’s play from the character of Carmen. The second part along with Irma’s response were abbreviations of a quote from Fritsch’s *Enigma Emmy Göring* when Dr Bösl, playing Hitler, says: “A good person, my dear Emmy! In reality there are, perhaps excepting myself, no good people Emmy. In reality there are only good actors”.

Distraction Camp drew attention to these roles available to women during fascism as well as in modern society, and our complicity in playing them. For example, while the reenactment of the scene from Cavani's *The Night Porter* restaged the master slave relationship in the context of fascism, in the additional context of sadomasochistic role-play it was emphasised that women often choose to play their roles as victim. Just as Genet reflects back to the audience the "evil" in themselves, Kriss Ravetto, who describes Cavani's film as "a network of spectacles ranging from ballet to opera, cabaret, men in uniform (nazi theatrics), (trans)sexual masquerades, and sadomasochistic plays", uses Deleuze to describe this scene in the film, where "the victim speaks the language of the torturer, with all the hypocrisy of the torturer" (172; Deleuze cited in Ravetto 169).¹⁰⁹ This scene reflected Benjamin Nelson's description of Genet's representation of the "sado-masochistic compulsions underlying the central institutions of the culture" where "Ruler and ruled, victim and persecutor, alike, are discovered to be perpetually entangled in a self-destructive round" (62). Cixous also acknowledges women's complicity in their victim role, "We are all victims, but we are also executioners" (qtd. in Sellers 154). In *Distraction Camp*, the character of Salome may have been the victim of the Camp Commandant but she was at the same time the 'real' executioner of the actor who had role-played her own execution in an earlier scene.

Cixous singles out Genet as a writer who explores the power of the feminine erotic: "There are some men (all too few) who aren't afraid of femininity" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 885). And she refers specifically to Genet when she discusses where writing comes from:

[I]t comes from deep inside. It comes from what Genet calls the 'nether realms,' the inferior realms (*domains inférieurs*). We'll try to go there for a time, since this is where the treasure of writing lies, where it is formed, where it has stayed since the beginning of creation: down below. The name of the place changes according to our writers. Some call it hell: it is of course a good, a desirable hell. (*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* 118)

Cixous embraces exactly the "desirable hell" in her writing that Genet and Artaud also reclaim. In doing so, like Nietzsche, she reintegrates the carnal or Dionysian body back into the processes of the rational mind. Unlike Nietzsche, and along with other feminists, she does it for women. If the devil and women are the great actors, perhaps it is from this "hell" as Cixous suggests, that women may find a way to write and perform their freedom.

¹⁰⁹ Ravetto does, however, echo Falkenberg's use of Baudrillard in the production when she discusses the scene in *The Night Porter*, describing the way, "For Cavani seduction is a transgressive force that disrupts the existing new world order" (170).

Lust, Caution (2007) Ang Lee

Directed by Ang Lee and based on a novella by Eileen Chang, the film *Lust, Caution* (2008) explores the problematic of sexual acting and its refusal for its female protagonist. Wang Jiazhi is a student at Lingnan University in Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation of World War Two. Along with her friends, she acts a role in a patriotic theatre performance to raise money for the Chinese resistance. After staging this performance the students decide they are not satisfied with acting the parts of revolutionaries in the theatre, they (like Genet) want to refuse acting and take action as revolutionaries in everyday life. They develop an assassination plot to murder the Government Security Chief, Mr Yee, a Chinese man who is collaborating with the ‘puppet’ government of the Japanese occupiers and responsible for the torture and murder of Chinese resistance members. He is heavily guarded by security so it is agreed that Wang Jiazhi will play the role of seducing him so that they can extract information and find a way to assassinate him.

Jiazhi creates a false identity as Mai Tai-tai, fits herself out in an expensive wardrobe that suits the position of a woman in high society, receives a brief sexual education from one of her revolutionary friends, and the group rent out a house for her residence. Through her acting the role of Mai Tai-tai, she makes friends with Mr Yee’s wife and gradually gains Mr Yee’s attention. They embark on an affair during which she is able to secretly provide information to her revolutionary comrades. The film’s climax occurs when the planned assassination is about to take place. Acting as Mai Tai-tai, Jiazhi lures Mr Yee into a jewelry shop around which her friends are poised to assassinate him. However, right when her friends are about to enter the shop to kill him, Jiazhi refuses to play her part, and whispers to Mr Yee at the final second “Go, now!”. In doing so Mr Yee immediately recognises that Jiazhi has been acting as a spy all along, flees the shop surrounded by his security officers. Before the day is out Mr Yee has her and her friends caught and executed. This ends the film.

In attempting to explain Jiazhi’s refusal to act her part at such a crucial moment, which is a renunciation of her political aims and leads to her immediate death, the film offers several possibilities, all centered around sexual theatricality. One explanation is that rather than refusing to continue her adopted role, she simply adopts a different one. We learn during the film that Jiazhi loves Hollywood films – she is shown, for example, sobbing in a cinema watching a scene from *Intermezzo: A Love Story* (1939) starring Ingrid Bergman. Such scenes suggest that the trope of romantic love that she has learnt from Hollywood may have been what led her into acting in the theatre and even into political action in the first place.

The role she played in life as the revolutionary spy Mai Tai-tai she may have learnt from actresses in spy films from this period. In saving Mr Yee's life she can be seen to be transitioning from femme fatale spy, to the archetypal sacrificial woman in love. This is the trajectory of Greta Garbo's character in *Mata Hari* (Fitzmaurice, 1932), a film to which *Lust, Caution* is widely compared, where an exotic dancer falls in love with the man she is spying on and, like Jiazhi, is caught and executed by firing squad. However, in *Mata Hari*, the protagonist was spying for the 'bad' Germans and so her assassination functions for an American audience as a kind of martyrdom where she is absolved of her sins. In *Lust, Caution*, Jiazhi is spying for the 'good' people (Chinese resistance fighters) and therefore her playing of the archetypal woman in love role is also a betrayal of them and therefore not easy for an audience (particularly a Chinese audience) to digest. When identifying with her throughout the film, we are then provoked or shocked by her refusal of one role over another, a role that makes her an accomplice to the Japanese occupiers.

Despite the parallels, it was not *Mata Hari* that inspired Ang Lee to direct the film, but two other Hollywood films (Lim). The first was *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946), another film starring Bergman, in which Bergman's character is recruited by the government agent she is in love with (played by Cary Grant) to spy on a Nazi in hiding in Brazil by seducing and marrying him. The second film to inspire Lee was *Dishonoured* (von Sternberg 1931), in which Marlene Dietrich plays the role of a spy called X-27, a prostitute who is hired as a Austrian secret agent to spy on the Russians. Dietrich's character falls in love with the man she is spying on and is executed for allowing him to escape. In both films, as in *Mata Hari*, women are spies who act in order to seduce men, but who fall in love (although not necessarily with the man they are spying on) and suffer fatally in doing so.¹¹⁰

In *Lust, Caution*, Jiazhi is ultimately more seduced and inspired by Hollywood cinematic and theatrical narratives, by what within these narratives is represented as 'love', than she is by revolutionary aims. This is discussed by Haiyan Lee in her article on *Lust, Caution*, "Enemy Under My Skin" when she writes of Jiazhi as a bourgeois romantic: "The bourgeois, it is believed, join the revolution for the aesthetic and emotional exultations that only a collective movement can offer, without a firm ideological commitment" (Lee 650).¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ While in *Notorious* the protagonist is poisoned to the brink of death, in *Mata Hari* and *Dishonoured*, both women essentially commit suicide by choosing love for the man they are spying on over their ideological mission as spies. *Dishonoured* is perhaps closer in essence to *Lust, Caution* in the respect that the Russian Dietrich's character is in love with and saves (via her effective suicide) is the villain in the film.

¹¹¹ Haiyan Lee also prefaces her article with George Eliot's quip in *Daniel Deronda* (1876): "There is no action possible without a little acting".

In *Lust, Caution* the revolution is also aestheticised. For example, the patriotic agit-prop performance the revolutionaries stage in the theatre is shown to use theatricality in order to evoke a passionate and explosive fervor in the audience, not so different to the (a)rousing fascist spectacles. The casting of the film also contributed to the aestheticising of the revolution within in, where the leading male revolutionary who acts as Jiazhi's lover in the patriotic play and is positioned as her potential lover in real life, is acted by a well-known Chinese pop-star Leehom Wang. What this suggests is very similar to what occurs in Genet's play (and also in several of the representations of Gründgens), where revolutionary desire is revealed to be aesthetic.

James Schamus, the writer of the screen-play, also discusses Jiazhi's act at the end of the film as a performance:

Why did she do it? The question is itself an admission of the impossibility of ever really answering it. And yet we ask. Another, more specific, way of asking: What act, exactly, does Wang Chia-chih¹¹² perform at that fateful moment in the jeweler's shop when she decides whether or not to go through with the murder of her lover? And here, two words – *act* and *perform* – indicate the troubling question Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) asks us: for at the crucial moment when we *choose*, when we *decide*, when we *exercise our free will*, are we not also *performing*? . . . Yee doesn't simply desire Mai Tai-tai while suspecting she is not who she says she is; it is precisely *because* he suspects her that he desires her. In this sense his desire is the same as hers: he wants to *know* her. And so lust and caution are, in Zhang's work, functions of each other, not because we desire what is dangerous, but because our love is, no matter how earnest, an *act*, and therefore always an object of suspicion. (Chang, Ling and Schamus xi-xii)

When the director Ang Lee was asked in an interview what aspect of Chang's story he most wanted to amplify in the film, he also answered: "Performance. Things about acting.

Performance not only in a stage play and her parts but in general. A big part of life is about performance. Think about sex, how it's about performance. To me that's very important and that's what I do too" (Guillen 3).

Ang Lee deliberately points to the sadomasochistic nature of the sexual relationship that Chang explored in her novella: "She understood playacting and mimicry as something by nature cruel and brutal: animals, like her characters, use camouflage to evade their enemies and lure their prey. But mimicry and performance are also ways we open ourselves as human beings to greater experience, indefinable connections to others, higher meanings, art, and the truth" (Chang, Ling, Schamus ix). Ang Lee sees the sadomasochistic sexual relationship also

¹¹² Chih-chih is an alternate spelling of Jiazhi.

as a metaphor for the political situation in the film: “It’s about occupying and being occupied. . . . The peril here is falling in love with your occupier” (Lim 3).¹¹³ Ang Lee discusses Chang’s approach to writing her novella and his own approach to the making of the film, in Artaudian terms, describing the way Chang “revised the story for years and years - for decades - returning to it as a criminal might return to the scene of a crime, or as a victim might reenact a trauma, reaching for pleasure only by varying and reimagining the pain. . . . [W]e simply kept returning to her theater of cruelty and love until we had enough to make a movie of it” (Chang, Ling Schamus vii). This sadomasochistic description of the creative process is also reminiscent of Genet’s perpetual rewriting of *The Balcony*.

The “theater of cruelty” that Ang Lee describes in Chang’s novel is explicitly embodied by the sex scenes in his film. In a scene in the film when Jiazhi is reporting back to the revolutionaries, she likens Mr Yee to a snake (or devil) who uses sadomasochistic acting to seduce her in return: “He knows better than you how to put on an act. He not only gets inside me...he worms his way into my heart like a snake. Deeper. All the way in. I take him like a slave. I play my part faithfully... so I, too, can get to his heart. Every time... he hurts me until I bleed... and scream. Then he is satisfied. Then he feels alive. In the dark... only he knows it’s all real.” This “darkness” Jiazhi describes may be the kind of erotic hell described by Cixous - something dark and dangerous but also creative and desiring. Donald notes: “Yee’s effect on Wang Jiazhi, even in the short story, draws her into the realm of truly erotic, and seriously dangerous theatre, and away from crude, and violently sentimental, student theatrics” (Donald 57). When comparing *Lust, Caution* to his previous film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) Ang Lee said: “ ‘Brokeback’ is about a lost paradise, an Eden. . . . But this one – it’s down in the cave, a scary place. It’s more like hell” (Lim). Rather than being emancipatory in Cixous’ terms, this sadomasochistic acting can also be seen (as it was also seen in *Distraction Camp*) to function in the film as a form of denial and escape for Jiazhi, where she translates the ideological fight with Mr Yee into a sexual sadomasochistic fight so she can perhaps deny to herself that she is effectively engaged in the action of a prostitute.

The film exposes the way the revolutionaries use Jiazhi as a tool to achieve their political objectives. Like Chantal in the brothel, who, as I discussed, critics describe as becoming a prostitute to the revolution, Jiazhi also performs the work of a prostitute towards revolutionary ends. Donald writes of the sequence from the film that “shows Wang [Jiazhi]

¹¹³ Before the assassination attempt Jiazhi waits for Mr Yee in a café where tango music is playing. This scene is shown twice in the film, and the tango music emphasises the sadomasochistic sexual role-play in which Jiazhi is engaged. The second time the scene in the café plays it is juxtaposed to the passionless silence of the Revolutionaries with whom she speaks on the phone.

learning the trade of political prostitution, and hints that the male student is beginning to enjoy his role in her protracted humiliation. Again the heroism of resistance is undermined” (Donald 55). In refusing to act at the end of the film the role of “political prostitute” that she has been groomed for by the revolutionaries, Jiazhi can also be seen to attempt to liberate herself from acting in favour of something more ‘real’. Haiyan Lee argues that Jiazhi’s act is “a feminist gesture of defiance by which a passive body speaks up as an acting and forgiving subject” (653). She sees Jiazhi’s act in feminist terms as the refusal of a false body in favour of a truthful one and as a consequence of the sex scenes that came before, something “activated by bodily memories – an instance of speaking sexual truth to power, as it were” (Lee 648). In this way Haiyan Lee argues that Jiazhi’s act at the end of the film is a transgressive and emancipatory rejection of the mind/body split which exists in many of the roles required of women in Confucian (and Western) society:

Her doubleness is only possible thanks to a theatrical division of the mind and body whereby the mind is a detached spectator of the body’s charade. Her final act, however, blurs this division. Instead of suspending the efficacy of her bodily role as Mrs Mai, she lets its objects, rituals, and emotions flood the theatrically detached space of the mind. For this coup against the ‘theatrical contract’... she pays with her life. (646)

Jiazhi’s acting as if she were in love, which meant having real sexual encounters, may have led to her being in love. Derrida wrote:

[T]o pretend, I actually do the thing; I have therefore only feigned pretence. . . . If the traitor pretends to assassinate the tyrant, then the crime has not taken place; but if he feigns the pretence, then he kills in earnest, and the actor was concealing an assassin all along. (qtd. in Descombes 139)

Kurt Vonnegut wrote similarly in his introduction to a 1966 edition of *Mother Night* (1961): “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be” (ix). The novel is a fictional account of a man who operates as an American spy in Nazi Germany and Vonnegut dedicated it to Mata Hari.

Like Haiyan Lee, Schamus argues that Jiazhi’s act of love “destroys the very theatrical contract that made the performance of that love possible” (Chang, Ling and Schamus xii). He places special emphasis on the way in which she does so: “[I]n killing off her fictional character, she effectively kills herself. Her act is thus a negation of the very idea that it could be acknowledged, understood, explained, or reciprocated by its audience” (xii-xiii).¹¹⁴ Schamus follows here Slavoj Žižek who in turn, following Lacan, describes the act

¹¹⁴ Jiazhi’s act immediately leads to her execution and as such it is an effective suicide. It can be compared in

of suicide as “the act par excellence” as it is “definitely *not* that of a speech act, of a performative” (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* 33). Žižek writes: “Perhaps we should then risk the hypothesis that, according to its inherent logic, the act as real is ‘feminine,’ in contrast to the ‘masculine’ performative, i.e., the great founding gesture of a new order” (*Enjoy Your Symptom!* 46). Žižek suggests that perhaps only such a (feminine) act is capable of refusing a society that Baudrillard describes as that of spectacle and simulation.¹¹⁵ Such an explanation suggests that Jiazhi may be “writing her body” in Cixous’ terms by taking it out of the system of exchange and production, which defined it in relation to men. So it is possible to see her suicide not only as a refusal to be cast in the role of political prostitute, but also as an ultimate act of emancipation and refusal of the male order. Schamus notes (as does Ang Lee) that Eileen Chang was married to a Chinese man Hu Lancheng, an official who collaborated with the Japanese during the Japanese occupation (Ding 96). This suggests that Chang’s novel may have been based on a predicament that she herself experienced. Another incident, which may have influenced her novel is that of a young female spy (Zheng Pingru) who during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai was killed by the man she was caught spying on (Ding 96).¹¹⁶

this way to Roger and Chantal’s suicides in *The Balcony*, Gründgens’ suicide in *Faust Chroma*, X-27’s suicide in *Dishonoured*, Mata Hari’s suicide in *Mata Hari* and the suicides of the protagonists in *The Night Porter*.

¹¹⁵ Žižek also applies his discussion of the suicidal act to Rossellini’s *Generale della Rovere* (1959). In this film, set in fascist Italy, Grimaldi is a petty thief with no moral conscience who plays roles in order to manipulate and rob people. Eventually he is caught by fascist authorities, but rather than be executed, he is offered a deal where he will enter prison in the disguise of a famous underground resistance leader, Il Generale della Rovere, in order to identify another resistance leader called Fabrizio, who is in hiding in the prison. He eventually discovers the identity of Fabrizio, but through playing the role in the prison of Generale della Rovere (which involved undergoing torture), Grimaldi develops a moral and political conscience, and rather than dobbing in Fabrizio he continues to play the role of Generale della Rovere and is executed. Žižek quotes Leo Braudy who believes “the importance of the film lies in its acceptance of artifice – role-playing, the assumption of disguise – as a way toward moral truth” (Braudy qtd. in Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* 33). Žižek writes: “[H]is [Grimaldi’s] very insistence on the mask becomes an authentic ethical deed. . . . The performative dimension at work here consists of the symbolic efficiency of the ‘mask’: wearing a mask actually *makes us* what we feign to be. In other words, the conclusion to be drawn from this dialectic is the exact opposite of the common wisdom by which every human act (achievement, deed) is ultimately just an act (posture, pretense): the only authenticity at our disposal is that of impersonation, of ‘taking our act (posture) seriously’ ” (34). Rather than being a refusal of acting, Žižek observes Grimaldi’s suicide in Nietzschean terms, where he goes from playing the role, to really ‘becoming’ it. This ‘ultimate act’ of suicide is represented in the film as an ultimate act of heroism, but it can also be seen as an ultimate act of fascism and integration into the system of simulation. As the film does not explore a refusal of acting it is not featured in my research.

¹¹⁶ Schamus also claims that Chang based the original story of *Lust, Caution* on a real life actress in the 1930s named Ruan Lingyu (Chang, Ling and Schamus xiv). Ruan Lingyu, who was the equivalent in China to the star power of Garbo in Hollywood, committed suicide one month after playing the role of Wei Ming in a film called *Xin nuxing* (*New Woman*, 1934). In this film the character Wei Ming wants to be a writer but ends up having to prostitute herself and commits suicide. This character Wei Ming was based on the real life of another actress, Ai Xia, who had committed suicide two years earlier, one year after writing and acting in a film called *Xiandai yi nuxing* (*A Woman of Today*, 1933) in which the protagonist prostitutes herself (Wang 239). This is a fascinating and uncanny occurrence where a real life actress (Ruan Lingyu)- via playing the role of a woman who has prostituted herself and committed suicide as a result, and which was a reenactment of the life and suicide of

For Tang Wei the actress, playing the role on film of Jiazhi had consequences in her own life. After *Lust, Caution* was released, Tang Wei was banned from the film industry by China's State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (Sarft). *The New York Times* reported that Chinese print and electronic news media were told "to immediately remove" any "works and commercials featuring Ms Tang" who was accused of "beautifying" traitors to the Chinese resistance ("China Bans Actress"). The ban included a multi-million dollar advertising campaign for Ponds (Fitzsimmons). Included in the public statement from Sarft, was: "Tang Wei is a good actress, but young people look at her and think, if I strip I'll get famous. So this attitude does not have a good influence on the young" (Zhang Haitao qtd. in Donald 63).

In refusing a conventional narrative where the Chinese resistance members are heroes and the protagonist is either a sacrificial martyr or romantic hero, upon its release, *Lust, Caution* came into direct conflict with the Chinese government who took exception to the film. But rather than censoring the work of the screenwriter or director, the government deferred the punishment for the protagonist's 'sins' upon the actress who played her. As Donald notes: "[T]he official position on the film would be to find ways of excising its refusal to engage only with the political dyadic, and replace an engagement with complexity in the text with a judgment on Tang Wei herself as the embodiment of the treacherous and sensual Wang Jiazhi" (Donald 61). In the announcement of her ban from acting, both in character and as herself in commercials, there was no distinction made between Tang Wei the actress and the role she acted as Jiazhi. In fact, as Donald notes, it was a "deliberate political confusion" (55). Tang Wei was accused, not of acting, but of being. The same blurring of acting and living that occurs to her character Jiazhi, was now being projected onto Tang Wei in real life by the Chinese government.

The crucial fact - that the character Wang Jiazhi committed these sexual acts in real life, whereas the actress Tang Wei acted them in a film - was ignored. This recalls Emmy Göring, as she is represented in Fritsch's play, lamenting the way actresses who kiss men on the stage are considered "loose". Barish, who identified the way actresses were considered prostitutes, also noted that "in China, until the Communist Revolution, actresses were regularly recruited from prostitutes, had effectively to continue as prostitutes while acting,

another real life actress - appears to have recognised this scenario in her own life and committed the act of suicide for real. Mark Cousins notes that *The New York Times* ran a front page article calling Ruan Lingyu's funeral "the most spectacular funeral of the century" and it is reported that during it three other women committed suicide (Cousins). Maggie Cheung played the role of Ruan Lingyu in Stanley Kwan's film *Actress* (also titled in English as *Center Stage*, 1991). In this film deliberate parallels are drawn between the lives both on and off screen of the three actresses, Ai Xia, Ruan Lingyu and Maggie Cheung.

and accordingly suffered the reprobation and ostracism inherent in that role (2). Tony Leung who played the role of Mr Yee and also stripped his clothes off, was not included in Sarft's ban.

The state's way of punishing the political transgression committed by the role Tang Wei the actress played, was to censor her body – and to censor the very scenes where the desiring female body (capable in Žižek's terms of founding a new order) is most resistant. Donald describes the way assumptions were made that “the passions expressed in the sex scenes might affect audiences in ways that could be socially disruptive or subversive” (47). He notes that Tang Wei herself was therefore “made a scapegoat for the disgust experienced by a masculinist political class when faced with female dissent and sexuality” (46). Not only was Tang Wei's desiring body censored from her body of work as an actress, in Mainland China the sex scenes from *Lust, Caution* appear to have been cut from the film completely (Ou-fan Lee 228).¹¹⁷ Donald notes that “The film's transgression lies in its visual commitment to the entanglement of the female sexual body, with a violent but vulnerable male body” (51). In Mainland China, the third sex scene in particular, “when entanglement and orgasm clearly indicate passionate desire, trumping political will, was removed” (55).

In a more recent film *The Founding of a Party* (建黨偉業, 2011), directed by Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin and which details the early years of the Chinese Communist Party, Tang Wei acted the role of an early lover of Mao Zedong (whose wife incidentally was also an actress who was imprisoned after his death and committed suicide). However, all of Tang Wei's scenes were cut from the film before its release upon the insistence of Mao's grandson, Mao Xinyu, a major-general in the People's Liberation Army, who objected to her because of her role in *Lust, Caution* (“The Founding of a Party”). This is another instance of Tang Wei's acting being deliberately confused with her real life identity. In spite of the reaction *Lust, Caution* had and the consequences it has had for Tang Wei's career in particular, when asked in an interview about her character Jiazhi's refusal to act, Tang Wei may also have been speaking for herself when she said: “I think to her, it's very good. She understands everything. She controls herself. She controls her life. It's good” (Guillen 3). Her experience of the role also appears to have enabled Ang Lee's vision for the film to come to fruition: “[S]he's like the female version of me – I identify with her so closely that, by pretending, I found my true self” (James, “Cruel Intentions: Ang Lee”).

¹¹⁷ Ge notes that “one commentator mused that to watch the [uncensored] film in Hong Kong was something like performance art, a performance of protest against China's censorship and regulation system” (Ge qtd. in Robert Chi 2009).

At the close of this chapter, a contradiction is now apparent, where on the one hand, my argument based around Barish's thesis that acting and pretending have historically been associated with the female, is now confronted with Žižek's argument that it is in fact the masculine which is performative and that only the feminine is capable of the real act that transcends man's "compulsive" performative activity. But perhaps this is not a contradiction at all. If woman is believed to be, and treated as, the devil, perhaps only she is capable of the ultimate defiance and refusal of this performative activity that reveals itself as simulation. After all it is only the devil who dared to refuse God the father.

Chapter Three: Refusal of Theatricality

In my analysis of Genet's *The Balcony* and Free Theatre's *Distraction Camp* in Chapter Two, I wanted to show how fascist theatricality (the material of Chapter One) has re-emerged in contemporary society in the form of sadomasochistic fantasy. Genet uses sadomasochistic acting in the theatre to explore the possibilities for refusing the sadomasochistic 'acting' of authority figures in everyday life but also exposes the way in which refusal is built into the system of simulation itself. I have examined how refusal in sexual theatricality, as it was represented in *Distraction Camp* via Artaud's conception of a Theatre of Cruelty and the tango, might be capable of resistance in feminist terms. And finally, I applied my analysis to Ang Lee's film *Lust, Caution* where the consequences of sexual role-playing in everyday life is explored and Žižek's conception of suicide as an ultimate (and ultimately feminine or feminist) refusal of acting emerges. In this final chapter I examine three films, *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), *The Idiots* (1998) and *I'm Still Here* (2010), which attempt to refuse acting and theatricality altogether.

There has been a historical shift throughout the last century where acting has been refused in favour of real action; where the conception of theatre, as false and distinct from 'real' life (an entertainment and distraction like the brothel) was rejected. This began with Stanislavsky's realism and was further developed in approaches to acting by Artaud and Grotowski who embraced ritual in the theatre. But whereas these artists explored a refusal of conventional acting within the theatre, a movement emerged alongside them that refused the theatrical space itself. In America during the 1950s and into the 1960s, performative interventions in everyday life by such people as John Cage and Alan Kaprow became known as happenings. Many happenings were one-off events, which were never recorded or repeated. Michael Kirby explains happenings by defining a continuum for acting, which ranges from "acting" (what he termed matrix performance) to "not-acting" (nonmatrixed performance), recognising "a shift toward the not-acting end of the scale" (qtd. in Zarrilli 53). He wrote: "To act means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate. As happenings demonstrated, not all performing is acting" (43). He proposed that, "In many cases nothing needs to be done in order to 'act' " (qtd. in Sanford 32). This kind of "not-acting" - a refusal of acting in favour of real life action - was seen as producing an authentic and truthful experience. For example, Kirby describes the way the "emotions apparent during a nonmatrixed performance are those of the performer himself. . . . Without acted emotions to

mask their own feelings, the performers' own attitudes are more apt to become manifest than they are in traditional theatre" (qtd. in Sandford 37). Whereas Stanislavsky aimed at producing action "as if" it were real, in happenings it *was* real. One example of a happening is Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964), where half naked performers engaged in a kind of Dionysian dancing and lovemaking with each other, raw chickens and dead fish, before covering themselves in paint and rolling around in it. She described her work at the time as "shameless eroticism [that] emerged from within a culture that has lost and denied its sensory connections to dream, myth, and the female powers" (Schneemann 31).

In Kaprow's definition of a happening he begins with: "(A) *The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible*" (qtd. in Sandford 235). One of his happenings, *Fluids* (1967), involved large ice structures left to melt in the street (Henri 96). Kirby gives a history of the New York happening movement tracing its roots to a diversity of art forms and movements such as Dadaism, German Bauhaus, Futurism, Surrealism, modern painting, sculpture, film, poetry and dance. He notes that the Dadaists in particular were the first to break down the distinction between performing and not performing (Sandford 17).¹¹⁸ In the breaking down of the division between audience and performer, Artaud's influence is clear, as Kirby notes: "Some Happenings are the best examples of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty that have been produced" (22). Raymond Federman is of the same opinion: "[T]he true form of theater desired by Artaud took shape in the *happening*" (qtd. in Brooks and Halpern 137). Martin Esslin also describes the connection: "Artaud's postulate that the theatre should merge with real life to form a genuine *event* has no doubt played its part in inspiring and influencing the movement towards a new form – the Happening" (Esslin, *Artaud* 93). Happenings deliberately produced the kind of confusion between acting and living that Nietzsche abhorred. But, emerging out of the cultural revolution as they did, they also contained the potential to expose and refuse the 'acting' in the simulated society that has, as Baudrillard and others argue, become our reality.

The early happenings inspired performance groups such as The Living Theatre who cited Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* as their core inspiration. Shank notes that, "in some productions of the Living Theatre, notably *Paradise Now*, the performers played themselves" (155). The Performance Group directed by Richard Schechner also emerged out of the

¹¹⁸ The term 'happening' came from Kaprow's 1959 performance *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (Sandford 34). This term was backdated and applied to performances that occurred throughout that decade. Adrian Henri cites the first "happening proper" as an event in 1952 organized by John Cage that involved Merce Cunningham and his dancers, poetry, paintings, lectures, ladders, a piano, a gramophone and coffee (88). Plunka notes that John Cage recited Artaud during this event (*Antonin Artaud and the Modern Theatre* 3-4).

happenings movement developing what became known as Environmental Theatre in productions such as *Dionysus in 69* (1968). An actor in this production remarked: “I am not interested in acting. I am involved in the life process of becoming whole” (Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* 201). The Living Theatre’s performances resulted in their relocating to Europe in 1964 in “voluntary, self-imposed exile” (Gottlieb 137). This occurred one year after their production of *The Brig* (1963), an anti-authoritarian performance in New York that led to a dispute with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the imprisonment of its directors and founders Judith Malina and Julian Beck for “impeding federal officers in the pursuit of their duty” during a seizure of their theatre (137).

Herbert Marcuse’s writing was a source of inspiration for these groups. Berghaus notes that a key text in the revolution was Marcuse’s thesis in *Eros and Civilisation* that “sexual repression is inextricably intertwined with political oppression” (373).¹¹⁹ In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse wrote: “Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation. In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal – the protest against that which is” (63). Douglas Kellner articulates this refusal that is at the heart of Marcuse’s work:

Marcuse. . . constantly advocated the “Great Refusal” as the proper political response to any form of irrational repression, and indeed this seems to be at least the starting point for political activism in the contemporary era: refusal of all forms of oppression and domination, relentless criticism of all policies that impact negatively on working people and progressive social programs, and militant opposition to any and all acts of aggression against Third World countries. Indeed, in an era of ‘positive thinking,’ conformity, and Yuppies who ‘go for it,’ it seems that Marcuse’s emphasis on negative thinking, refusal, and opposition provides at least a starting point and part of a renewal of radical politics in the contemporary era. (Kellner, “From 1984 to One-Dimensional Man”)

Wolf Vostell, whom Günter Berghaus described as the father of the European happening movement, wrote in a 1964 manifesto, “happening = life – life as art – no retreat from but *into* reality – making it possible to experience & live its essence – not to abandon the world but to find a new relation to it” (qtd. in Sandford 325). Jean-Jacques Lebel another prominent European happenings artist also expressed this sentiment: “The Happening is not

¹¹⁹ This connection is also discussed by Lebel: “Happenings bring us back into contact with our instincts, whose sexual basis has been sublimated for the sake of culture. They give expression to our subconscious and turn dreams into actions” (qtd. in Sandford 353). A refusal of this sexual and political repression is illustrated in happenings such as Carolee Schneemann’s. The Living Theatre also explored the relationship between sexual acting and politics in a production called “Seven Meditations on Political Sado-Masochism” (1973) which they revived again in 2007.

content merely with interpreting life; it takes part in its development within reality” (271). The reality that was being developed in these European happenings (although like in America they were not defined as happenings early on) was more politicised than the culture that occurred as a result in America (371). In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” Judith Butler describes the threat inherent in taking acting outside the theatre: “[T]he various conventions which announce ‘this is only a play’ allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous...” (qtd. in Case, *Performing Feminisms* 278). In his history of the happenings movement Berghaus described the situation in Europe where the “danger” emanating from this confusion was used to directly refuse the state authorities: “Happenings are a protest against the power of State authority, the politics of the ruling class, the controlling of our actions through the police and of our mind through the censors” (qtd. in Sandford 352). He also described happenings as “a confrontation with our alienated existence in late-capitalist society” (372).

These more radical happenings were an aestheticised expression of revolution in Artaudian terms as evident in Lebel’s description of the revolution as a happening in 1969: “The old avant-gardist dream of turning ‘life’ into ‘art,’ into a collective creative experience, finally came true. . . . The May uprising was theatrical in that it was a gigantic fiesta, a revelatory and sensuous explosion outside the ‘normal’ pattern of politics” (Lebel qtd. by Berghaus in Sandford 359). ‘Acting’ as a pretending of reality is refused or, if using Hegelian dialectics, is ‘aufgehoben’, that is, at the same time denied, preserved and raised to a higher plane of social reality. In the same way that Genet left the theatre to join the revolution outside it, and Artaud expressed his desire near the end of his life to throw bombs instead of making theatre, Berghaus notes that “Lebel regarded his participation in the burning down of the Paris stock exchange on 24 May 1968 as the pinnacle of his career as a Happenings artist” (qtd. in Sandford 375). In a letter of August 1970 to Vostell, Lebel declared:

There is truly no longer any separation between ‘art’ and ‘life’: the permanent creative process of life as art is taking form on a mass basis and has become a collective movement. . . . There is more honour in being a street guerrilla than being an artist – and it is more useful. The ideal, of course, is to be *both*, and in May there were millions of them on the streets of Paris creating and living the revolution (Lebel qtd. by Berghaus in Sandford 375).

Later Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* wrote of the spectacle of terrorism as a radical refusal of our simulated consumer-capitalist society: “Terrorism is always that of the real” (47). The attacks of 9/11 in America, in particular the two planes hitting the Twin

Towers of the World Trade Centre, was a theatrical spectacle that was simultaneously an efficacious refusal of American ideology. One didn't have to be there to experience it either, as it was filmed and transmitted in real time on television to people all over the world. As Baudrillard described the event in *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002): "This is *our* theatre of cruelty. . . . the purest form of spectacle – and a sacrificial model mounting the purest symbolic form of defiance to the historical and political order" (30). Stockhausen also acknowledged the theatricality of this event calling it "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos" (qtd. in Schechner, "9/11 as Avant-Garde Art?" 1820). As a result, all of Stockhausen's upcoming concerts were cancelled, as, to suggest that such a cruel real life event could be seen as theatrical was deemed taboo by many. Schechner in his article "9/11 as Avant-Garde Art?" (2009), discusses the way the attacks shared the aims of many of the Avant-Garde manifestos throughout the last century. 9/11 (or September 11) as it has become known was interpreted as a happening, a Great Refusal on a grand scale.¹²⁰

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002) Žižek likewise notes that the attack of 9/11 was an act of terror that depended as much upon the theatrical spectacle of violence it created as it did upon the violence it inflicted: "[T]he 'terrorists' themselves did not do it primarily to provoke real material damage, but *for the spectacular effect of it*" (11). Žižek describes the way 9/11 was experienced around the world: "It was when we watched the two WTC towers collapsing on the TV screen, that it became possible to experience the falsity of 'reality TV shows': even if these shows are 'for real', people still act in them – they simply play themselves" (12). Intrinsic to the terror 9/11 created was the suicidal acts of the terrorists who committed it. These suicides were uncompromising refusals of western capitalist consciousness.

Like Baudrillard and Artaud before him, Žižek suggests that perhaps only such (suicidal) acts of terror are capable of penetrating and disrupting the simulation we have come to accept as reality. Lentricchia and McAuliffe in *Crimes of Art and Terror* (2003), also liken terrorism to a transgressive artistic desire "not to violate within a regime of culture... but desire to stand somehow outside, so much the better to violate and subvert the regime itself" (2-3). However, they discuss the way the spectacle of 9/11 was ultimately reigned into the simulation that it initially appeared to penetrate, citing the "sublime power of American

¹²⁰ Carole Schneemann made a photographic work based on these events called *Terminal Velocity* (2001), which comprised of photos depicting people falling out of the towers to their deaths.

consumer culture to absorb and commodify. . . . Pose for a picture: mix disaster and death with stardom and beauty” (16-17).¹²¹

The Chelsea Girls (1966) Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol emerged as an artist during the period of happenings. Warhol began his work in the early 1960s in New York and was prolific in many media including film, videotape, photography, writing, sculpture, commercial art, drawing, silk screening and painting (Glick 137). He was reportedly inspired to start filmmaking after seeing Jonas Mekas’ film of The Living Theatre’s *The Brig* (Comenas, “Andy Warhol, The Connection and The Brig”). His early films reflect the influence of the happening scene at the time in the way they involve a refusal of acting. For example, in his first film *Sleep* (1963) Warhol continuously filmed his lover John Giorno sleeping and in *Blow Job* (1964) he filmed in close-up the face of a man receiving a blowjob.¹²²

Between 1964 and 1966 Warhol compiled five hundred screen tests of people who visited the factory space where he worked. But rather than being required to play a role, a screen test in Warhol’s factory required guests to simply sit in front of his camera for the length of a three-minute reel. Some of the screen tests were of celebrity artists who visited the factory such as David Bowie and Salvador Dali. But they also included factory regulars who became Warhol’s own “Superstars” by starring in the films he had began making. Instead of acting a character and learning a script, in *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1966) Edie Sedgwick was instructed to go about her everyday activities. Like most of his films, it is filmed using a stationary camera, and consists of sixty-six minutes of Sedgwick in her bedroom applying make-up, ordering breakfast, listening to records, dressing, and talking to her friend Chuck Wein who is off-screen.¹²³ Warhol explains his technique, which allows

¹²¹ Schechner also discussed this phenomenon in regards to the revolution of the 1960s that his theatre had been a part of. When discussing the failed revolution in Genet’s *The Balcony*, in the context of his own performance of the play in 1979, he stated that the revolution was in his view ultimately “also a failure, just another sham performance” (Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova 219).

¹²² Reminiscent of Warhol’s early films in the way a “Superstar” is represented refusing to act, was a recent installation at the MoMA Art Gallery called *The Maybe*. In the installation, actress Tilda Swinton slept inside a glass box, on display for people to gaze at. Devised by Cornelia Parker, Swinton first performed this in 1995. Catherine Fowler compares Swinton’s first performance of the work in the Serpentine Gallery with Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963): “Warhol and Parker confront us with their subjects’ bodies such that we cannot ignore the realities of sleep: the loss of pose revealed in involuntary movements, secretions (of sweat, dribble, and tears)” (qtd. in Holmes and Redmond 248).

¹²³ Sections of the film can be found on Youtube, see “Poor Little Rich Girl – Edie Sedgwick – Part 6/7.” Youtube.

him to avoid acting: “With film you just turn on the camera and photograph something. I leave the camera running until it runs out of film because that way I can catch people being themselves. It’s better to act naturally than to set up a scene and act like someone else. You get a better picture of people being themselves instead of trying to act like they’re themselves” (qtd. in O’Pray 33-34).

Warhol specifically selected ‘actors’ who he perceived as not being able to act, as Peter Wollen explains: “Warhol surrounded himself with ‘leftovers’ and set about turning them into ‘stars’ – not just ordinary people, as in the Hollywood myth, but rejects, people ‘turned down at auditions all over town’ ” (qtd. in O’Pray 23).¹²⁴ In an interview with David Ehrenstein in 1966, Ehrenstein asked if Warhol would do a film with Hollywood actress Carroll Baker:

Warhol: Uh... no.

Ehrenstein: Why not?

Warhol: Uh... she has too much acting ability... for me.

Ehrenstein: People with acting ability are not the kind you need?

Warhol: No. I want real people. (qtd. in Goldsmith 65)

In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975) Warhol expanded on this: “I can only understand really amateur performers or really bad performers, because whatever they do never really comes off, so therefore it can’t be phony. . . . What I like are things that are different every time. That’s why I like amateur performers and bad performers – you can never tell what they’ll do next. . . . If I ever have to cast an acting role, I want the wrong person for the part” (82-83). In addition to this refusal of acting, these early films also refuse cinematic convention. The main narrative action taking place in *Blow Job* for example, is happening off-screen.

The Chelsea Girls (1966), directed by Warhol who worked closely (in his first of many collaborations) with Paul Morrissey, comprises of twelve back-to-back thirty-two minute reels, each starring one or several of Warhol’s “Superstars”. The premise is set up that each scene occurs in a room of the Chelsea Hotel in New York. Each scene in the film is like a happening and is centered around a scenario which is then improvised upon. Several scenes were at least partly scripted by Ronald Tavel, although Wollen notes that Warhol demanded “‘situation’ and ‘incident’ rather than ‘plot’ or ‘narrative’ Later he realized that with a cast of confessional exhibitionists, he could dispense with the idea of a writer entirely” (qtd. in O’Pray 25). Juan Suarez writes of the way that Warhol was involved in “elevating the

¹²⁴ Warhol wrote in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, “I always like to work on leftovers, doing the leftover things. Things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good” (93).

everyday into a realm of aesthetic intervention” (239).

What is significant in *The Chelsea Girls* is that while the actors were instructed to “be themselves” within given scenarios, i.e. not to act, many of the scenes in this film involve the actors taking on particular roles. Warhol explains how “[e]verybody went right on doing what they’d always done – being themselves (or doing one of their routines, which was usually the same thing) in front of the camera” (Warhol and Hackett 180). In one scene, for example, Mary Wolonov pretends to be Hanoi Hannah, a Vietnamese woman whose false English language radio reports during the Vietnam War were aimed at deterring the American war effort. There is a sadomasochistic edge to many of the role-plays in the film including in this scene. As Hanoi Hannah, Wolonov interrogates and verbally abuses Susan Bottomly who acts as a GI soldier. There is no attempt at a naturalistic representation and no illusion is created that the actors are the roles they play. Sprawled on hotel beds they move seamlessly in and out of their roles.

This conceit of acting in the film along with the sadomasochistic nature of the role-plays is reminiscent of Genet’s *The Balcony*. But whereas in *The Balcony* the actors play characters who play roles in the theatre, in *The Chelsea Girls* the actors play themselves playing roles in the actual hotel.¹²⁵ In Warhol’s film the actors take real drugs, talk to real people on the phone who are not aware that they are involved in a film and talk about real things that are on their minds. Warhol says of his actors: “Their lives became part of my movies, and of course, the movies became part of their lives; they’d get so into them that pretty soon you couldn’t separate the two, you couldn’t tell the difference – and sometimes neither could they” (qtd. in Smith, *Warhol’s Art and Films* 166). Warhol gives an example:

For her reel in *Chelsea Girls*, Brigid [Polk] played the Duchess. She got so into the role that she started to think she really was a big dope dealer.... as we filmed, she picked up the phone and called a lot of real people up (who had no idea they were part of her movie scene) telling them about all the drugs she had for sale. She was so believable that the hotel operators, who were always listening in, called the police. They arrived at the room while we were still filming and searched everyone. (Warhol and Hackett 181-2)¹²⁶

The scene in *The Chelsea Girls* which is most talked about and which contains the most defiant refusal of acting, is in one of the two final reels in the film. In this scene, which Mekas describes as “probably the most dramatic religious sequence ever filmed”, one of

¹²⁵ As I discussed in Chapter Two this layer of the actors own identities was hinted at in *Distraction Camp*.

¹²⁶ When discussing his early tape recordings Warhol said: “You couldn’t tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn’t decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing” (Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* 26-7).

Warhol's "Superstars" Ondine acts the role of Pope Ondine by shooting up with methadone and demanding someone to give confession (Mironneau). Ondine talks to people who are milling around the set or operating the camera including Warhol and Morrissey. He plays the role of a symbolic Pope of Greenwich city, an alternative and subversive Pope who embraces perversion and homosexuality and criminality and rejects middle-class heterosexual values. This is exactly the kind of subversion that Genet explored in his work and that Sartre understood when he titled his biography of Genet, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. Warhol refers to Genet when he discusses the sexuality in his work: "[W]hen you read Genet you get all hot, and that makes some people say this is not art" (qtd. in Wolf 111).¹²⁷ Like Genet, Ondine also glorified and celebrated the criminal underclass as a way of pointing out the hypocrisies of bourgeois mentality.

Rona Page enters nine minutes into the reel and plays the role of someone who has come to confess. Ondine as Pope invites her over to the couch: "Come in young lady and confess, you'll feel much better for it. . . . The cameras are rolling." Rona feigns surprised at this, "Cameras?" Ondine replies: "Yes, cameras, yes, this is a new kind of confessional." Here role-playing and the camera's presence in the recording is acknowledged and incorporated into the scene. The audience to the film is made complicit in the performance of the confession – just like in Falkenberg's direction of scenes from *The Balcony* in *Distraction Camp*. And just like in the scene with the Bishop in *The Balcony*, in *The Chelsea Girls*, Rona role-plays a confession of lust for Jesus:

Rona: Father, I have a tremendous love in my heart.... The problem is that... that it's a very wrong kind of love.

Ondine: Wrong, you mean sexual?

Rona: Yes.

Ondine: Blow him.... Go right down on his image.

Rona: Then I'll be freed?

Ondine: You'll be freed.

Rona: But the problem is he's not real, he's not a real man.

Ondine: He is.

Rona: No he's not.

Ondine: Yes he is, you just have to believe in the image. Go up to the nearest image of Christ, particularly the ones on the cross.... Kneel down, peel away the loincloth in your mind and go about your business, you know, do what you have to do. Oh, you'll have a wonderful time, my child!

Unlike in Genet's play where the young girl's lusts are refused by the Bishop, in this scene, Ondine as Pope fully embraces and endorses the young girl's sexual fantasy, refusing the

¹²⁷ Reva Wolf discusses Genet's connection to Warhol in *Andy Warhol: Poetry and Gossip in the 1960s*, pp. 111-123.

titillation that is provided by refusal within this generic sexual role-play. But in *The Chelsea Girls*, as in *The Balcony*, the problem of acting is encountered. Rona points out that she would have to pretend to “blow” Jesus because he is not real (and in extension suggesting perhaps that Christianity is therefore based on acting/lying). Ondine refuses to accept this insisting that image is everything, just as Genet explores in his play the way “the Image and the Reflection” are all that exist in a simulated society. But Rona persists in provoking Ondine:

Rona: I want to... to confess about my disrespect for your... listening.

Ondine: That’s all right. Everyone’s skeptical.

Rona: This is not really skepticism at all. It’s just that... I think you’re a phony.

Ondine: So are you. Even worse than me.

Rona: I’m trying to do something. You’re trying to be a Pope.

At this point Ondine explodes in a violent rage, throwing a glass of water in Rona’s face and slapping her repeatedly. His explosion in response to her suggestion that he is acting is an act of cruelty with Artaudian intensity – a refusal of her implied division between acting and living:

Ondine: Leave me before I tarnish you and the rest of your filthy image, get out of here. Get out! Get out of here you creep. . . . You’re a whore my dear (*slap*), a whore (*slap*), how dare you, how dare you. You mother fucker, I’m a phoney? Well so are you. . . . I hit you with my vested hand, you dumb bitch! How dare you come onto a set and tell me I’m a phony on my set. . . . Do you know what she had the nerve to do, audience of mine? She came onto my set, as a friend, who ‘didn’t know what to do’ and said I was a *phony*. Well, fuck her, and I’ll beat her up again, and her husband [Jonas Mekas] and anyone else who comes on, in my time and tells me what I am, how dare they. . . . Whore! Only, whores have hearts, you bitch and you don’t. . . . God forgive her and all who are like her, who pretend to do good in the name of good. They are lying, phoney miseries.

Ondine’s strategy of attacking Rona Page (apart from the physical violence) is first to suggest that if he is a phony then so is she, but then it is to call her a whore – to insult her by insisting that she is exactly the role (of slut) that she is acting – in other words that she is not acting either.

The film crew and Rona herself were shocked by Ondine’s explosive reaction. Warhol wrote that, “it was so for real that I got upset and had to leave the room – but I made sure I left the camera running” (Warhol and Hackett 181). He also wrote that he felt “bad about the girl. It wasn’t her fault. I mean, she just happened to be there...” (Scherman and Dalton 359). Mark Lancaster, who was also in the room during the filming, said: “By this

time I felt sure that this was not ‘acting,’ as it were. I was quite scared, and saw that other people were backing away. I put the mic down on something and backed away myself, noticing then that Andy had also done so, leaving the camera running. I think the girl ended up running out screaming” (Comenas, “Mark Lancaster Interview”). These reactions all suggest that Ondine’s actions as Pope Ondine were experienced as a sudden break from the acting of the role-play into reality. And the trigger for this is Rona’s accusation that Ondine is acting.

But Ondine’s reaction could also be seen as his insistence on the efficacy and reality of the role-play itself. It suggests that Ondine had invested so much in his role as Pope that it had become inextricably linked to his identity, and he could no longer separate his own identity from that of the role he played. Like other “Superstars” in *The Chelsea Girls*, such as Brigid Polk who acted as the Duchess, Ondine often acted as Pope Ondine in his everyday life. Even Ondine was not his real name, but a name he adapted once he began to hang out at the factory. His real name was Robert Olivio. This helps explain therefore why he was not able to separate his acting in the film as Pope from his ‘acting’ in life where he was also playing the role of Pope Ondine. Billy Name discusses the scene in Warhol’s film:

One of the few times Andy knew that he had reached an epitome of filmmaking was Ondine slapping Rona. . . . It was so perilous and real because it *was* real. He knew he could never do that in a scripted manner with professional actors. He picked people who revealed themselves. Even though you can only reveal yourself explosively, or effectively, once in a while. I mean, there are so many uninteresting Ondine films as opposed to that one incredible reel. (Scherman and Dalton 359-360)¹²⁸

For Ondine, to be called a “phony” - to be accused of acting and through his acting concealing the truth of his real existence - was to suggest he had no existence at all. In Koch’s analysis of the scene, “Trying to be cute for the occasion, she [Rona] violated the flicker of Ondine’s, and the film’s, life” (97). Like Jiazhi in *Lust, Caution* she “violated the theatrical contract”. In the film, Ondine is in a way insisting on the conditions of a simulated society, and seeing that as acting is everything, acting is therefore sacred. David Bourdon notes that part of Ondine’s tirade towards Rona included, “What you’re trying to undermine here is your very existence” (Ondine qtd. in Bourdon 248).

At this point in the scene Ondine attempts to stop it from continuing before the reel is up, “I really don’t want to go on.” He gets up from the couch to avoid the camera, which attempts to locate him in the darkness for the next couple of minutes. Eventually he returns to

¹²⁸ Two years later Warhol gave Ondine speed and tape-recorded him for twenty-four hours, turning the result into *a, A novel* (1968).

the couch to continue until the end of the reel. He explains to the camera and those left in the room what just happened:

Ondine: To come in as a friend and do evil. I think it's the most disgusting thing a human being can do. I have never been able to do it and never will be. . . . I don't like to hit people, I don't like it when people hit me. I think it's ugly and boring. But when I see something as stupid as I just saw sitting here and pretending, I have to rail out. I have to hit it. Because it deserves to be put in its place. It's place is below me. Beneath me.

Here, somewhere between his everyday persona as Ondine (a role-play and a remove from his original identity as Robert Olivio) and his role playing of the Pope for the film, he evokes in Christian terms the anti-theatrical prejudice in order to accuse Rona of the "evil" of lying and pretending. This is also expressed in one of the first two scenes in the film, another scene in which Ondine stars as Pope Ondine. In this scene, this time with Ingrid Superstar playing the confessor, Ondine is concerned with the same problem: "Unburden yourself. . . Tell me everything." At his request Ingrid relates her first sexual experience to him. Near the end of the reel he says: "You're going to hell. Every time you open your mouth you lie." In the later scene with Rona, Ondine repeats Rona's words that most affected him: "The words are 'I'm the real phoney.' That's what she said. 'I'm not trying to be anybody.' Does she think I was really being the Pope?" Here he makes it clear that it was an accusation that his role-playing was phony that upset him and that he refused, not an accusation that he wasn't the Pope.¹²⁹ This appears all the same to have been an experience that Ondine (Olivio) never fully comprehended. In a 1978 interview he says: "[H]ow many times have I seen the last segment of *The Chelsea Girls*? And to this day I don't know what happened" (Ondine qtd. in Smith, *Warhol's Art and Films* 445).

This confusion and conflation of acting and living is described by Jonas Mekas in his 1966 review of the film: "Many strange lives open before our eyes, some of them enacted, some real – but always very real, even when they are fake" (qtd. in Bourdon 238). Also in this review he explains:

[O]ne of the amazing things about this film is that the people in it are not really actors; or if they are acting, their acting becomes unimportant, it becomes part of their personalities, and there they are, totally real, with their transformed, intensified selves. The screen acting is expanded by an ambiguity between real and unreal. This is part of Warhol's filming technique, and very often it is a painful technique. (qtd. in Murphy 173)

¹²⁹ This is established in the earlier scene with Ingrid Superstar where, as David Bourdon notes, Ondine says: "I'm not a real priest. . . [.] this is not a real church" (243).

Patrick Smith describes Warhol's films as working towards a "Cinema of Cruelty", a direct reference to Artaud's theatre in its reference to the effects of this "painful technique". Carlos Kase also notes that in their filmic collaborations Tavel and Warhol interviewed the performers in order to "learn their insecurities" (83). Tavel commented in an interview that Warhol's technique was to "literally torture the performance out of them by being as cruel as possible" (qtd. in Kase 83).¹³⁰ Ondine also remarked on the way Warhol spread rumours amongst his actors to spice up the scenarios and is reported to have described the film as "a living torture test" (Smith 445; qtd. in Kase 86). Ondine was also cognisant to its ritual nature: "It was fabulous, it was a statement, it was a total work of art. It's an absolutely solemn black mass" (qtd. in Bockris, *Warhol* 258). Amy Taubin describes Warhol's camera as "a weapon" and Stephen Koch writes: "Both actors and audience in *The Chelsea Girls* confront the problem of what to do with the length of that inexorable reel" (qtd. in MacCabe 29; 93).

Warhol's "painful technique" was also evident in the spectacle of screening the film, which had much in common with the happenings in New York at the time. A split screen on which two reels were projected alongside each other made the film screening three and a quarter hours in total (and not six and a half as it would otherwise have been). The ability of the spectator to be seduced by the cinematic illusion as in conventional narrative cinema was refused, as was the possibility that this split screen could be interpreted as two scenes occurring simultaneously within the cinematic temporality of the Chelsea Hotel, as actors often appeared in both reels at the same time.

Alongside the happenings of that period, *The Chelsea Girls* is a film that refuses acting, replacing it with a reality where acting has become reality. Mekas believed that Warhol's direction was "letting the thing speak for itself. . . without any illusions" (Mekas in O'Pray 41). He contrasted this to the *cinéma vérité* of Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut etcetera, about which he states: "The truth became a fiction, a fantasy" (40). Mekas wrote about Warhol's early films:

It is hard to imagine anything more pure, less staged, and less directed than Andy Warhol's *Eat, Empire, Sleep, Haircut* movies. I think that Andy Warhol is the most revolutionary of all film-makers working today. He is opening to film-makers a completely new and inexhaustible field of cinema reality. (qtd. in Wolf 128)

¹³⁰ Herwitz describes the sadomasochistic process of Warhol's film-making where his Superstars "live in Andy Warhol's universe of the cult icon: a beautiful, cruel universe. Warhol's work joyfully embalms the star while disposing of her in flat indifference without aura. His work takes pleasure in her suffering (it is sadistic), but also deeply invested in her (it is empathetic)" (31).

Stephen Koch discusses the refusal inherent in *The Chelsea Girls* when he states that the film's "coherence is located in the elegance of its refusal, the serene coolness of the way it says *no* to the conventional experience of devouring filmic time. It is located in the voluptuousness of a spectacle that does not give. . . . [E]very assent to the film's appeal must converge with some refusal, however delicate" (91-2).

Warhol himself discussed his films in very conventional terms, not in terms of refusal but on the contrary as an affirmation of capitalist society. He said, "I love Hollywood. It's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic" (Bockris and Malanga 63) and

I made my earliest films using, for several hours, just one actor on the screen doing the same thing: eating or sleeping or smoking; I did this because people usually just go to the movies to see only the star, to eat him up, so here at last is a chance to look only at the star for as long as you like, no matter what he does and to eat him up all you want to. (qtd. in O'Pray 56-7)

By refusing acting in his films and letting his own "Superstars" do what they pleased he embraced them as consumable products and revealed a reality where people are acting all the time. His interest in the refusal of acting was expressed when he wrote in *America*: "I love it when you ask actors, 'What're you doing now?' and they say, 'I'm between roles.' To be living 'life between roles,' that's my favorite" (63). His interest in how they 'act' in their everyday lives however is expressed in another passage:

Politicians and actors can change their personalities like chameleons, and the rest of us do it every day. . . . You're just like a politician except they've really practiced and they're perfect at it. They can walk into an embassy or before the news cameras and act their way into *anything*. So I'm always wondering: do politicians ever go too far in this? Do they ever wonder: where's the *real* me? (154)

Warhol saw playing roles as an essential part of everyday life, not just of actors but also of politicians. Like Fritsch, here Warhol uses the term "chameleon" to describe the way politicians and actors use acting to adapt themselves to particular circumstances and the way this pretending may become their reality.

Warhol was observant and articulate about the way capitalism operates and embraced its logic. For example, he said: "All my films are artificial, but then everything is sort of artificial. I don't know where the artificial stops and the real begins" (qtd. in O'Pray 37). By refusing the kind of "phony" acting that pretends there's a reality where acting does not take place, and replacing it instead with a revelation of the role-playing inherent in everyday life, Warhol's work can be seen to expose Baudrillard's notion of a simulated society. In his 1970

essay “Pop: An Art of Consumption” Baudrillard rejects Warhol’s work as a critique of capitalism, writing that there is “no art of the everyday: this is a mystical aporia. If Warhol (and others) believe in it, this is because they delude themselves with regard to the very status of art and of the artistic act” (40). In *Simulations*, Baudrillard refers to Warhol in his discussion about how art has lost its meaning:

Art can become a reproducing machine (Andy Warhol), without ceasing to be art, since the machine is only a sign. . . . And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own image. Reality no longer has the time to take on the appearance of reality. (*Simulations* 151-52)

Yet in interview with Françoise Gaillard in 1990, Baudrillard also praised Warhol as a “founder of modernity” who “freed us from aesthetics and art...” (“Starting from Andy Warhol” 44). In the interview he explained:

The only things I said about art that excited me were on Warhol, Pop Art and Hyperrealism. I think Andy Warhol was the only artist at a time when art was caught up in a very important transitional movement. . . . Everything that characterizes his work – the advent of banality, the mechanized gestures and images, and especially his iconolatry. . . . Later on, others simulated it, but he was the greatest simulator, with style to match! . . . Andy Warhol was a big moment in the 20th century because he was the only one who had a gift for dramatization. He still managed to bring out simulation as a drama, a dramaturgy. (43)

By embracing the logic of simulation and making it visible via a refusal of acting, in *The Chelsea Girls* Warhol potentially opens it to question.¹³¹

The two scenes in *The Chelsea Girls* that feature Ondine as Pope are juxtaposed next to reels that star Nico, the famous German model, singer and actress. In the beginning sequence she is in a kitchen with her son and another male Superstar, cutting her hair carefully with a pair of scissors.¹³² The last scene features a close-up of her face where Nico is crying and coloured lights are reflected onto her. However, she refuses to emote in an exaggerated or theatrical way. Like a mirror, she becomes, in this scene, a surface for projection. Next to the Pope Ondine scene it is as if she is a receptacle for his ravings, and in

¹³¹ Glick also observes the way, “Warhol’s art fascinates precisely because it critiques commodity relations and self-consciously inhabits them” (Glick 136).

¹³² This is another example of how the happenings inspired Warhol’s work. As Kirby notes: “Merce Cunningham did a piece called Collage at Brandeis University in 1953 in which he used fifteen untrained ‘dancers’ who performed simple, ordinary movements and activities such as running and hair combing” (qtd. in Sanford 42). One of Warhol’s first films *Haircut* (1963) involved this also.

both her scenes she seems conspicuous for her apparent lack of role-playing.

Falkenberg, who directed Fritsch's *Nico: Sphinx of Ice* (*Nico: Sphinx aus Eis*), notes: "Nico, in her roles as singer for the Velvet Underground and as a performer in *Chelsea Girls*, could neither sing nor act. What she could do was to be a blonde – that is, a brand like Warhol's other blondes" (*Nico*... 3).¹³³ Nico's role as "blonde" was originally played by Edie Sedgwick who appeared in some scenes in *The Chelsea Girls* before leaving the factory and asking for them to be cut. In a passage from *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* where he refers to Sedgwick as Taxi, Warhol describes Sedgwick's "poignantly vacant, vulnerable quality that made her a reflection of everybody's private fantasies. Taxi could be anything you wanted her to be. . . . She was a wonderful, beautiful blank. . . . She was also a compulsive liar; she just couldn't tell the truth about anything. And what an actress. She could really turn on the tears" (33). Sedgwick's ability to be "blank", where her 'acting' in life was transparent perhaps, is what Warhol appears to have sought in his "Superstars". His interest in Nico, may have been also, at least in part, because of her ability to be "blank". He wrote that Nico was "a new type of female superstar. Baby Jane and Edie were both outgoing, American, social, bright, excited, chatty – whereas Nico was weird and untalkative. You'd ask her something and she'd maybe answer you five minutes later. . . . She wasn't the type to get up on a table and dance, the way Edie or Jane might; in fact, she'd rather hide under the table than dance on top of it" (Warhol and Hackett 182). Reviewer Jenna Joost says of Nico's performance in *The Chelsea Girls*: "She is the true 'star' of the film; not putting on an act, or trying to entertain us" (Mironneau). Baudrillard however considers Nico's attraction in life as precisely the 'act' she puts on: "Nico seemed so beautiful only because her femininity appeared so completely put on. She emanated something more than beauty, something more sublime, a different seduction. And there was deception: she was a false drag queen, a real woman, in fact, playing the queen" (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 13).

A year after she appeared in *The Chelsea Girls* Nico released a record called *Chelsea Girls* (1967) in which she sung songs about each of the "Superstars" in Warhol's factory. Soon afterwards she famously refused the image she had created during her time with Warhol and became very ugly (for example, letting her teeth rot and the effects of heavy drug taking ravage her body). Falkenberg observes: "When Nico repudiated Lou Reed and instead aligned herself with Jim Morrison (of The Doors), she also came to a turning point in her performance of self, in art and in life. With and through Morrison, Nico started to write her

¹³³ Monteiro describes Nico as "the striking German model and singer as a fetish object placed before the viewer's uninterrupted gaze" (Monteiro 45).

own songs and tried to become an artist in her own right” (“Nico: I’ll be Your Mirror” 4). In other words Nico refused the role of “blank” blonde. As Falkenberg notes: “She refused to become a mirror for a man” (4). The Free Theatre production of *Nico: Sphinx of Ice* was presented as a companion theatrical work to *Enigma Emmy Göring* and they were performed together on the same evenings. In the context of the Free Theatre productions, Fritsch’s Nico represented a refusal to play the role of the sweet actress and woman that Emmy represented.

It was another blonde actress, Marilyn Monroe, who was an early fascination for Warhol when he created his famous silkscreens of her duplicated image *The Marilyn Diptych* (1962) immediately after her suicide.¹³⁴ His interest in her appears to be her seductive appeal as a Hollywood superstar but importantly also her refusal of this ‘acting’ in her films and everyday life via suicide.¹³⁵ He began exploring suicide in his filmmaking with *Suicide* (1965) (also called *Screen Test #3*). Roger Vaughan quotes Warhol as saying, “I found this person, my star, who has 13 scars on one wrist and 15 scars on the wrist from suicide attempts. He has marvelous wrists. The scars are all different shades of purple. This was my first color movie. We just focused the camera on his wrists and he pointed to each scar and told its history, like when he did it, and why, and what happened afterward” (283). Ronald Tavel recalled,

I was to act out the people who had provoked him, the guy was to reenact the suicide attempts. . . . [A]nd he cooperated completely, as suicides will. It was Andy’s idea to just focus in on the wrists with all these slashes and to have not blood but water spilled from a pitcher onto the wrists after each ‘story.’ You would never see the guy’s face. . . . [I]n the middle of it the guy freaked out and took the water and threw it in my face. (qtd. in Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* 163)

Suicide was not released because the actor threatened legal action (163). The actor appears to

¹³⁴ Glick writes, “Warhol’s most radical and productive insight was perhaps how he reshaped sexuality into a cultural effect of commodity aesthetics. . . . Repeating her lips 162 times in 49 square feet, the image invokes an assembly line sexuality rather than the actress’ heartbreaking beauty. It does not nostalgically mourn her tragic death. . . . but instead documents the commodification of her body while invoking the great Warholian themes of profit, death and fame. Warhol brilliantly abstracts and desexualizes the ‘essence’ of Marilyn as object of exchange, subject to endless repetition and fetishistic fragmentation” (Glick 139-40).

¹³⁵ Warhol continued with his interest in suicide in a series of silkscreened paintings developed from photographs completed during 1962-63 as part of his “Death and Disaster” series (which may have inspired Schneemann’s 2001 *Terminal Velocity* exhibition). These included *A Woman’s Suicide* (1962) depicting a woman jumping off a building, *Suicide (Silver Jumping Man)* (1963) depicting a man jumping from a building, *(Purple Jumping Man)* (1963), *Bellevue I* (1963), *Bellevue II* (1963) showing people gathered around a body which has just hit the ground (Bellevue is the name of a New York hospital), *White* (1963) and *Suicide (Fallen Body)* (1962) where Warhol used as subject a photograph he found in the newspaper taken in 1947 of the dead body of a woman Evelyn McHale who had jumped minutes earlier from the top of the Empire State building (Frei and Printz 286-293). Within these paintings he duplicated the image of suicide just as he did with Marilyn’s face.

have ultimately refused to simulate his acts of suicide for Warhol's camera.¹³⁶ Vaughan reports that when it was suggested to Warhol that he should film a real suicide he replied: "Ohh, wouldn't that be something. . . . One of my friends committed suicide recently, but he didn't call me. . . . He was so high he didn't think, I guess. He was a dancer and had been in a couple of my films. He got high and just danced right out the window" (Warhol qtd. in Vaughan 283). Warhol is referring to the dancer "Freddie" Herko who committed suicide as a performance in 1964. He explains in *POPism*:

One night he [Herko] showed up at Diane di Prima's to borrow a record and invited everyone there to a performance; he said he was going to leap off the top of his building downtown. A few days later. . . he turned up at an apartment on Cornelia Street that belonged to Johnny Dodd. . . . What Freddy did when he got inside was go and take a bath. The apartment was stuffed with stage props and collage things. . . . After his bath, Freddy put Mozart's *Coronation Mass* on the hi-fi. He said he had a new ballet to do and he needed to be alone. He herded the people there out of the room. As the record got to the 'Sanctus,' he danced out the open window with a leap so huge he was carried halfway down the block onto Cornelia Street five stories below. (85)

It may be that suicide fascinated Warhol as a kind of authentic act (in Žižek's terms), a refusal of acting in a society in which acting is everything. Similar to the actor who refused to give over the rights to his simulation of suicide - Herko appears to have refused an audience to witness his final 'act'.

Suicide as a refusal of acting in film and in life is perhaps most poignantly expressed in the life of Edie Sedgwick, Warhol's most famous "Superstar". *Lupe* (1965) made a year before *The Chelsea Girls*, starred Sedgwick and was based on the suicide of actress Lupe Velez, who Warhol describes as,

the Mexican Spitfire, who lived in a Mexican-style palazzo in Hollywood and decided to commit the most beautiful Bird of Paradise suicide ever, complete with an altar and burning candles. So she set it all up and then took poison and lay down to wait for this beautiful death to overtake her, but then at the last minute she started to vomit and died with her head wrapped around the toilet bowl. We thought it was wonderful. (Warhol and Hackett 127)¹³⁷

As Callie Angell notes in *The Films of Andy Warhol (Part II)*, although Warhol's movie took Velez as its inspiration, like *Poor Little Rich Girl*, it featured Edie "simply acting as herself. . . engaged in what might have been the regular activities of her life - listening to music, dancing, playing with a kitten, taking pills, eating supper, waking up in the morning, putting

¹³⁶ Douglas Crimp says the actor was Rock Bradett (154).

¹³⁷ For a description of the film, which is available to view in the Andy Warhol Museum Pittsburgh, see Murphy pp. 160-163.

on her makeup, getting a haircut from Billy Name, and so on” (24).¹³⁸ After making the film Vivienne Dick explains, “Edie didn't want to be in any more films after this. She became paranoid about her ability to act and she didn't know if she was being made fun of or not. She was also taking a lot of drugs. Warhol wanted to do a retrospective of her films around this time. She refused” (qtd. in O'Pray 158-9). Edie's life in Warhol's factory as one of his “Superstars” may have reflected what de Beauvoir writes of the experience of stars in Hollywood:

The subjection of Hollywood stars is well known. Their bodies are not their own; the producer decides on the colour of their hair, their weight, their figure, their type; to change the curve of their cheek, their teeth may be pulled. Dieting, gymnastics, fittings, constitute a daily burden. Going out to parties and flirting are expected under the head of ‘personal appearances’; private life is no more than an aspect of public life. . . . The whole life of the hetaira is a show; her remarks, her parroting, are intended not to express her thoughts but to produce an effect. With her protector she plays a comedy of love. (de Beauvoir 583-584)

In refusing to work with Warhol after this film and demanding her scenes be cut from *The Chelsea Girls*, Sedgwick may have wanted to refuse her ‘acting’ life.

Warhol is reported to have said on the afternoon after shooting *Lupe*: “When do you think Edie will commit suicide? I hope she lets me know so I can film it” (Comenas, “Lupe (1965)”). Edie's death several years later in 1971 of barbiturate intoxication was declared by the coroner as “undetermined / accident / suicide” (“Edie Sedgwick”). Sedgwick's (possible) suicide (and the spiral of excessive drug taking that led to it) can be seen as acting and living coming together in her own life just as it did in the films she made with Warhol. For example, Murphy's description of the character Sedgwick plays in *Lupe* could be applied to Edie herself given that she was directed not to act: “Lupe, who acts very casually in both reels, is choreographing her own color-coordinated building to suicide” (162). Could Sedgwick's own suicide be seen as an ultimate refusal of acting in Žižek's terms, of the roles she played not only in Warhol's films but also in her everyday life? Or alternatively, was her suicide simply a fulfilment of her roles in these films, a continuation of acting, as it may have been for Jiazi in *Lust, Caution*?¹³⁹

¹³⁸ *Lupe* was screened like *The Chelsea Girls*, in double projection (Murphy 160).

¹³⁹ Sedgwick starred in several other films, in which a confusion of acting and living resulting in suicide was represented. Callie Angell who catalogued and researched Warhol's films over many years notes that in 1966 Edie starred in *The Match Girl* directed by Andrew Meyer and based on Hans Christian Anderson's story: “In this allegorical film, a thinly fictionalized Edie character, ‘the Match Girl,’ becomes involved with ‘the Artist’ (played by Warhol himself), appears in some actual *Screen Tests* shot at the Factory, and then, suffering from loneliness and alienation, consoles herself by taking an overdose of pills” (*The Films of Andy Warhol: Part II*

The way Warhol's actors acted as themselves in his films, as they did in the happenings of that period, had an effect on acting in the theatre in the 1970s where actors appeared as themselves onstage. In 1971 Patti Smith and Sam Shepard refused acting when they used their own lives as material for a play they also performed in titled *Cowboy Mouth*. In her autobiography *Just Kids* (2010) Smith writes: "It wasn't hard to write the play. We just told each other stories. The characters were ourselves. . . . Perhaps it wasn't so much a play as a ritual" (185). *Cowboy Mouth* was about two lovers, Cavale (acted by Smith) and Slim Shadow (acted by Shepard) and involved improvisation. During the writing and rehearsal process Smith recalls Shepard saying to her, "Say anything. . . . You can't make a mistake when you improvise" (185). Smith recalls, "I found myself at home onstage. I was no actress; I drew no line between life and art. I was the same on - as offstage" (186). In the play, Slim Shadow eventually leaves Cavale to go "back into his own world, his family, his responsibilities, leaving Cavale alone, setting her free" (185). Smith reports that this plot played out in their real lives during the performance season as Shepard made the decision to refuse their 'acting' together in life and in the theatre by leaving Smith to return to his wife and family (186).

Spalding Gray also refused acting when he appeared as himself onstage in his solo performances in collaboration with Elizabeth LeCompte (both were members of Schechner's Performance Group and later the Wooster Group). In a documentary directed by Steven Soderbergh, Gray remarks: "It was like inverted method acting. I was using myself to play myself". Philip Auslander describes Gray as creating "the 'Spalding' persona, which began as a fictional conceit of his performances, [and] has become 'real' by virtue of its continual reappearance in the cultural arena" (*Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* 37). During his performances Gray would interview the audience and talk with them: "I enjoy telling the story of life more than I do living it." During one performance Gray spoke about a love affair he was having: "It was like I was in a movie, and I didn't know whose film it was,

25). Sedgwick's last film in which she starred and finished shooting weeks before her death was *Ciao! Manhattan* (1972) directed by John Palmer and David Weisman. In this film, while she plays the role of "Susan" it is a more or less biographical account of Edie's own life after her time in Warhol's factory. Audio recordings of Sedgwick discussing her life in the factory are used in the film along with other events from Edie's own life. Conspicuous in this discussion is her talk of suicide. For example, in one scene she talks about her abusive father and her brother who committed suicide. Sedgwick's other brother died eighteen months after this brother in a motorcycle crash that Sedgwick also believed was suicide: "Edie told her friend Gillian Walker that she knew that Bobby was going to die and that he had killed himself" ("Edie Sedgwick"). Like with Warhol's *Lupe*, at the end of *Ciao! Manhattan* Sedgwick's "character" Susan commits suicide. The film was finished within weeks of Sedgwick's overdose and it is possible that her death (intentional or not) was in part a direct extension of these roles she played as herself onscreen.

and I was going through the motions” (*And Everything is Going Fine*).¹⁴⁰ Brechtian inspired actors such as Anna Deavere Smith also refused the illusion of transformation into character. Deavere Smith agrees with Schechner’s conception of the “not not” – the idea that the actor is not their character but also “not not” their character: “I think this is the most we can hope for. I don’t think we can really ‘be’ anybody else” (Deavere Smith qtd. in Luckhurst and Veltman 132).

Towards the end of his life Warhol’s major artistic creation was making a “Superstar” of himself. Warhol was born Andrew Warhola but fashioned many different identities for himself (or had them fashioned for him) during his lifetime, including “Andre Warhola, Andrew Morningstar, Andy Paperbag, Raggedy Andy, Miss Warhola, Drella, the Pope of Pop, and Saint Andrew” (Cresap 41). Glick writes: “Warhol used his effeminacy, aesthetic costume, intimacy with objects, and celebrity connections to advertise himself as a highly polished, aesthetic surface” (152). Glick describes Warhol’s “ongoing effort to aestheticize his life and body - through wigs, cosmetics, fashion, plastic surgery, collagen injections, and other skin treatments” (Glick 153). Warhol’s appearance was imitated by Edie Sedgwick who in the early days of the factory dressed up like him and dyed her hair silver like his and many people were unable to tell them apart (Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* 164). In 1967 Warhol sent an impersonator out for a lecture tour of five colleges:

Amazingly, his impersonation [Allan Midgette] was not discovered until four months after the tour was completed. . . . Warhol had to return fees and redo lectures at several universities - the ones that were not completely put of by his scam. During this second tour, officials often went to absurd lengths to verify that they had the genuine article. Recalling the episode years later, Warhol said, ‘I still thought that Allan made a much better Andy Warhol than I did. . . . Who wants the truth? That’s what show business is for – to prove that it’s not what you are that counts, it’s what they *think* you are’. (Cresap 14-15)

Mekas reports one occasion where Warhol discussed the problematic of acting in life:

‘I’ve been thinking about it,’ conceded Warhol. ‘I’m trying to decide whether I should pretend to be real or fake it. I had always thought everyone was kidding. But now I know they’re not.’ He looked worried. ‘I’m not sure if I should pretend that things are real or that they’re fake. You see,’ said Warhol, craning his head absently, ‘to pretend something real, I’d have to fake it. Then

¹⁴⁰ As part of the Wooster Group he created a performance *Rumstick Road* (1977) which was an exploration of his mother’s suicide: “It was a confessional act. . . . At last I was able to put my fears of, and identification with, my mother’s madness into a theatrical structure” (Shank 171). Gray, who had a history of suicide attempts, also died in 2004 by suspected suicide after he went missing off the Staten Island Ferry (A. Williams).

people would think I'm doing it real'. (qtd. in O'Pray 37)¹⁴¹

Bockris describes Warhol's most consistent appearance during the 1960s where he was "dressed like an SS guard in a B-movie about the Second World War, with a few embellishments of his own: black leather jacket, tight black jeans (under which he wore panty hose), T-shirts, high heeled boots, dark glasses, and a silver wig (to match the Silver Factory). Sometimes he emphasised his pallor and Slavonic features with make-up and wore nail polish" (*The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* 148).¹⁴² This particular aestheticism, that was inspired by fascist aesthetics and that went on to inspire punk rock, is connected to what is known as camp. In her well-known essay on camp, Sontag writes that camp is "one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon" (2). She adds: "To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater" (3). Sontag herself appeared in seven of Warhol's screen tests and Warhol's film *Camp* (1965) was apparently a response to Sontag's essay (Crimp 131; Angell, "Andy Warhol, Filmmaker" 133).¹⁴³ Many people have described Warhol as an actor in life in the tradition of camp. For example, one of his "Superstars", Ultra Violet said: "Andy loves to play dumb - the village idiot, the global idiot" (qtd. in Cresap 110).¹⁴⁴ However, rather than acting - which is central to Sontag's understanding of camp - Warhol on the contrary can be seen to have refused acting in his own life just as he instructed the actors in his films. He said: "I'm very passive. I accept things. I'm just watching, observing the world" (Warhol qtd. in O'Pray 60). For Warhol, this surface was all: "Just look at the surface of my films and my paintings and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it" (Warhol qtd. in Cresap 17).

Warhol and the avant-garde film movements of the 1960s and 1970s can also be seen in connection with the more recent phenomenon of reality television and its industry of

¹⁴¹ See my discussion on pp. 99 in Chapter Two of Derrida's problematic that when someone pretends to pretend, they "actually do the thing".

¹⁴² Ragona discusses Warhol's films in her dissertation, "A genealogy of spectacle: Fascism, consumerism and the mimetic body."

¹⁴³ For a discussion of camp in Warhol's filmmaking see Matthew Tinkcom, "Andy Warhol and the Crises of Value's Appearances."

¹⁴⁴ Others include Kelly M. Cresap who describes Warhol's development of the persona of a "naïf-trickster": "His extraordinary ability to deploy cognitive refusal lies at the core of his provocations in the realms of both pop and queer culture" (65). Edmund White describes him as a "brilliant dumbbell" (qtd. in Cresap 116). Hal Foster called him "the great idiot savant of our time" (qtd. Cresap 116). Truman Capote called him "A Sphinx without a riddle" (qtd. in Cresap 130). And Andrew Ross described him as "a kind of chic Mephistopheles" (qtd. in Cresap 189).

creating celebrities and superstars out of everyday people.¹⁴⁵ The premise of reality television seems that acting is refused in favour of real life. Early reality television seems to have adopted the techniques of Warhol's filmmaking and cinéma vérité with long uninterrupted takes, spectacle rather than narrative and improvised dialogue. Lynn Spigel writes: "Warhol's sense of a life performed for the media is encapsulated by his most famous quip, 'In the future everybody will be world-famous for fifteen minutes,' a phrase that takes on new meaning in the age of reality TV" (Spigel 275). Baudrillard observed that reality television had become "a sacrificial spectacle offered to 20 million Americans. The liturgical drama of a mass society" (*Simulations* 51). But whereas in *The Chelsea Girls* acting is refused, in reality television what appears as a refusal of acting is deliberately contrived, acted for the camera and edited into narrative, resulting in a simulation of reality. Baudrillard sees this phenomenon as an illustration of the simulated society in which we live that has enabled "the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV" (*Simulations* 55). This was something already proposed by Warhol when he mused: "Before I was shot, I always thought that I was more half-there than all-there – I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say that the way things happen in the movies is unreal, but actually it's the way things happen to you in life that's unreal" (Warhol 91).¹⁴⁶

Reality television can be seen to reassure its audience that some real truthful action is possible in a simulated society where increasingly everything is seen as acted and pretended. This is expressed by Neal Gabler: "[T]urning life into escapist entertainment is a perversely ingenious adaptation to the turbulence and tumult of modern existence" (qtd. in Bial 75). Gabler notes: "We can remain constantly distracted. Or, put another way, we have finally learned how to escape from life into life" (qtd. in Bial 75). Bradley D. Clissold, in his analysis of the early reality television phenomenon of *Candid Camera*, for example, describes the way "A form of simulation-anxiety works its way into every *Candid Camera* skit, where something extraordinary occurs and candid subjects find themselves questioning the reality of the situation" (qtd. in Holmes and Jermyn 49). Žižek discusses *The Truman Show* (1998) directed by Peter Weir as an example of this, what he calls the "ultimate American paranoid fantasy. . . an individual living in a small idyllic Californian city, a

¹⁴⁵ See Joshua Gamson, "The Unwatched Life Is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture" in *PMLA Special Topic: Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety*.

¹⁴⁶ Warhol began working with television in the eighties and just before his death had begun production on a show directed by Peter Sellars and hosted by a robotic double of Warhol himself (Otty 1). The working title of the television show was "Andy Warhol: A No-Man Show." Lisa Otty remarks that Warhol's robotic double could be seen in Baudrillard's terms as "the simulacra of Warhol replacing the artist himself" (2).

consumerist paradise, who suddenly starts to suspect that the world he is living in is a fake, a spectacle staged to convince him that he is living in a real world” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 12-13). But Žižek compares the film to the reality television phenomenon *Big Brother*, noting that unlike in *The Truman Show* where Truman is “duped into really believing that he lives in a real community” and therefore at the end of the film doesn’t refuse acting but rather refuses being lied to and manipulated, in *Big Brother* the actors consciously act as themselves ‘for real’: “The distinction between real life and acted life is thus ‘deconstructed’: in a way, the two coincide, since people act their ‘real life’ itself, i.e., they literally play themselves in their screen-roles (here, the Benthamian paradox of the self-icon is finally realized: the actors ‘look like themselves’)” (“Big Brother, or, the Triumph of the Gaze over the Eye” 226). Žižek suggests that this logic has translated from reality television into our own lives where the only way we feel we exist is when we are gazed at: “[T]he subject needs the camera’s gaze as a kind of ontological guarantee of his/her being” (“Big Brother, or, the Triumph of the Gaze over the Eye” 225). In this way, we only feel that we exist if we are acting in front of a camera. Žižek discusses this logic in relation to sex,

a game sustained by some masturbatory fantasmatic scenario. . . . [W]hat if ‘real sex’ is nothing but masturbation with a real partner. . . . In other words, what if, in our ‘real lives,’ we already play a certain role – we are not what we are, we play ourselves? The welcome achievement of ‘Big Brother’ is to remind us of this uncanny fact. (226)

He also echoes Baudrillard’s comments regarding television when he observes that “in late-capitalist consumerist society, ‘real social life’ itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbours behaving in ‘real’ life like stage actors and extras” (Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 14). So a refusal of acting would become a refusal of life itself. And here we can return to his earlier argument, when he suggests that suicide may be the last possibility of refusal.

The Idiots (1998) Lars von Trier

Just as acting is refused in *The Chelsea Girls* to expose the reality of acting in everyday-life, so too in *The Idiots* acting is used to expose and refuse the false and contrived ‘acting’ dictated by the conventions of society. This is a reversal of the anti-theatrical prejudice as it is usually used to refuse acting. The film culminates in the final scene when Karen returns with a friend to her family home after an unexplained absence of several weeks following the death of her baby. The reception she gets from her family is cold. While they

are sitting around having coffee and cake Karen starts acting as an intellectually disabled person, making spasmodic gestures, squealing, and letting food and coffee spill out of her mouth and dribble down her chin. Her family reacts in stunned horror, shock and disgust and at one point her husband slaps her across the face. Karen and her friend get up to leave and the film ends. In this scene Karen refuses to ‘act’ the prescribed social role of grieving mother demanded of her by the oppressive middle-class society in which she lives. And she expresses this refusal by acting, via role-playing an ‘idiot.’ When in *The Chelsea Girls* Ondine slaps Rona, it is as a reaction to her refusal to acknowledge the authenticity of his role-playing. In a kind of reversal of this scene, in *The Idiots* Karen provokes a similarly violent reaction from her husband but in this case it is as a refusal of the authenticity of her role-playing. For the audience of this scene, however, it is clear that Karen’s ‘fake’ role-playing is the first authentic action in her life. Spassing may be as Anne Jerslev puts it, “the only true place from which her trauma can be articulated” (62).

The Idiots depicts a group of people in their thirties who, like Karen, attempt to refuse the oppressive ‘acting’ expected of them in bourgeois society. They refuse this ‘acting’ by role-playing as intellectually disabled people, calling this action ‘spassing’. They leave their families and their jobs to live together in an empty house that belongs to an absent uncle. For most of the film the group spass either in their own environment, or they pretend to be a group of genuinely disabled people and visit the local swimming pool or restaurant. The film is structured around a series of these episodes (which could be considered happenings) and in their discussions about them before and afterwards. A lot of the scenes where the act of spassing refuses and reveals bourgeois ‘acting’ take place in restaurants or in eating situations – the arena in which “performances” of the etiquette that defines the values of middle-class society are on display.

For Stoffer, the leader of the group, acting the idiot represents a kind of existential freedom from his own otherwise bourgeois life. The revolutionary aim of this ‘spasser’ project and the group’s goal of refusing the false ‘acting’ of bourgeois life is tested several times in the film, for example, when the group is visited by some people with Down Syndrome. Here von Trier puts authentic ‘idiots’ and pretend ‘idiots’ together in the same scene. Ove Christensen writes about the way intellectually disabled characters in this scene are positioned as markers of authenticity: “The Downers act as themselves or at least they are placed as themselves within the film’s universe. It is assumed that the Downers are identical with themselves” (41). In the context of the intellectually disabled people, the intention of the spassers is tested and most of the group seem thwarted by their desire to behave (‘act’) in a

politically correct manner. With the exception of Stoffer the characters begin to lose faith in spassing at this point as the ‘real idiots’ threaten to expose the spasser project as bourgeois ‘acting’ and escapism. As an ultimate test Stoffer challenges the group to spass in front of people they know. In the end, Karen is the only one daring enough to do it.

Karen’s refusal of ‘acting’ through acting is reflected in the form of the film itself. Directed by Lars von Trier *The Idiots* was the second film made under the rules and conditions of Dogme 95 – a manifesto for the cinema that von Trier had developed together with another Danish film director Thomas Vinterberg three years earlier in 1995.¹⁴⁷ On 20th March 1995 at the Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe in Paris honoring the centenary of filmmaking von Trier publicly declared their manifesto, which stated:

As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise. The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love. To DOGME 95 the movie is not illusion! (von Trier and Vinterberg)

In a revolutionary and theatrical gesture, von Trier then threw off a balcony copies of this manifesto printed on red leaflets (an action he then repeated at Cannes). This was the same theatre where Genet’s production of *The Screens* was interrupted and stormed by a group of right wing French imperialist revolutionaries in 1966, and that was occupied by left-wing student revolutionaries in 1968. Reflecting back on his declaration von Trier spoke wryly: “And in this theatre in Paris, I took these red leaflets and threw them out over the balcony. It was beautiful, you know, like in the old days...” (Kelly 137).¹⁴⁸ Von Trier, who was an established and successful filmmaker at the time, was essentially refusing the kind of filmmaking that had created his own success. He declared his pursuit of truth and authenticity and his rejection of falseness and illusion. By using techniques from happenings or reality television in *The Idiots* he also began to refuse representational acting.

To achieve a truthful and revolutionary cinema von Trier and Vinterberg devised a set of ten rules that were included in this manifesto. They called these rules “The Vow of Chastity” and this vow included such requirements as: the camera must be hand held; shooting must be done on location; the sound must never be produced apart from the image; no genre films; the film must be shot in colour; no superficial action; and the director must not be credited.¹⁴⁹ Dogme 95 was a revival of the filmmaking of the French New Wave

¹⁴⁷ The first Dogme film was Vinterberg’s *The Celebration* (*Festen*, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ While von Trier himself talks about a balcony some writers such as Jack Stevenson describe him throwing the leaflets off the stage (*Lars von Trier* 102).

¹⁴⁹ *The Idiots* was shot on digital video, which was actually against another of the rules, which specifies that Dogme films must be shot in Academy 35 mm film. However, it was blown up to 35 mm for projection and

filmmakers like Godard and Truffaut who preceded the 1960s cultural revolution during the period of the happenings, and the German New Wave directors, Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Wim Wenders, who followed during the seventies. These filmmakers also created a cinema that they saw as an alternative to the illusions that Hollywood created that supported and promoted the values of capitalist society and the interests of the bourgeois within it. However, like Jonas Mekas in his comments regarding the “fantasy” produced by *cinéma vérité*, the Dogme 95 manifesto also states that the New Wave movement was false: “The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby false” (von Trier and Vinterberg).¹⁵⁰

The refusal of conventional acting which is expressed both in the content and form of *The Idiots* is described by Tim Walters as an attempt “to locate an elusive sense of the ‘real’ in late capitalist (film) culture, one in which the spassing (or sustained faking of mental disability) on the part of the film’s characters is ideologically reflected by the seemingly amateurish precepts of its construction” (Walters). He also writes: “Is the manifesto not at least in part about the content of form, the inherence of ideology, the imbeddedness of meaning in the structures of what we take for reality?” (Walters). This was also observed by Jens Albinus who acted as Stoffer in the film: “[T]he cinematic rules of Dogma 95 and the fiction itself were deeply intertwined and took shape simultaneously” (Oxholm and Nielsen 33). In other words, von Trier was spassing with the camera in the way the characters are spassing with their bodies. Walters notes the way von Trier “disables” himself via his adherence to the Dogme rules, which enables the film’s revolutionary potential: “[I]t may even help us imagine a different way of being in our culture” (Walters).¹⁵¹

distribution, mitigation to the rules that the Dogme “brotherhood” voted in favour of (von Trier and Vinterberg were soon joined by Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring) (Hjort, “Dogme 95” 487). Anne Wival was an early member but left after two years (Stevenson, *Lars von Trier* 106). Shooting in digital allowed von Trier to film lengthy improvisational looking takes.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Morrissey made the connection between his and Warhol’s films and Dogme 95, in 1999 when he said: “I was already making dogma films thirty years ago. . . . Back then they were called something else, and were ‘dogma’ out of pure necessity. But I am probably thus far the only director who has adhered to the manifesto’s point number 10: that the director must never be credited” (qtd. in Stevenson, *Lars von Trier* 135). One difference between them is that Warhol used a stationary camera for most of his filmmaking whereas von Trier’s hand held camera produces a very different effect. In his interview with Koutsourakis von Trier says: “[A] hand-held camera tells you more, while a camera on the tripod tells you less. A hand-held camera is like hand-writing” (160). As Koutsourakis notes, “Consequently, the camera becomes a provocateur and not a passive recorder of actions” (161).

¹⁵¹ While the other early Dogme films also adhere to the “Vow of Chastity”, Walters criticises them for their “political tameness” in failing to construct similarly radical narratives.

The film received a hostile response from many media, as Walters notes: “Most mainstream media outlets (newspapers and magazines, network television shows) virtually rejected *The Idiots* wholesale as a monstrous freakshow, if they acknowledged its existence at all” (Walters).¹⁵² Walters discusses this response as a direct reaction to the refusal of bourgeois society that the film represents: “[I]t is no coincidence that *The Idiots* was despised for reasons that I suspect are, at bottom, not aesthetic but ideological” (Walters).¹⁵³ Von Trier discussed the hostile reaction he received from his colleagues when they asked him: “Why do you hate film so much?” (“Lars von Trier ‘Idioten’ Interview Cannes”). When asked if the film was a prank von Trier replied: “I don’t think I’ve done anything in my life that wasn’t serious. It might look like a joke. But so does life” (“Lars von Trier ‘Idioten’ Interview Cannes”).

Central to what creates such discomfort in its audiences is the way in which the film deliberately confuses acting and actual behaviour in everyday life. *The Idiots* was released in 1998, the same year as *The Truman Show*, when reality television was hitting its stride. The Dogme 95 rules such as the use of hand held camera and no optical filters give the impression, as with some reality television, of something real caught on camera. There are also documentary-like interviews with individual characters throughout the film, which mimic the structure of reality television. The interviews, conducted by von Trier himself, are of the characters, however von Trier’s presence blurs the boundary between the actor and the character, as Angelos Koutsourakis notes: “These ruptures clearly complicate the boundaries between the diegetic and the meta-diegetic universe” (162).

Von Trier has acknowledged his aim to confuse acting and non-acting in the film. In an interview with Koutsourakis he said: “I am interested in capturing the actors when they are in and out of character. The borderline between the private individual and the character is very intriguing. Especially, when it overlaps and you cannot tell whether a reaction can be attributed to the actor or the character. That is where I try to go very often” (Koutsourakis 158). In an interview after the film’s release, Anne Louise Hassing, who plays Susanne,

¹⁵² *The New York Times* reviewer wrote that the film has “nothing on its mind besides the squirming discomfort of its audience” (Scott, “The Idiots – Film Review; Colloquies on the Finer Points of Drooling”). *Jam Movies* considered that the film “veers too close to gross exploitation of people with mental and physical challenges.... Combine the dubious content of the film with its herky-jerky technical style, and von Trier does his audience no favours. He seems to think we’re the idiots” (Kirkland). Ireland banned the film entirely (Stevenson, *Lars von Trier* 131). And *Sight and Sound* called it “an all but impenetrable muddle” (Brooks, “Burn, baby, burn” 35). Peter Jenson the producer of *The Idiots* summed up the film’s general reception: “There are very few lovers of that movie” (Walters).

¹⁵³ He also notes the film’s critical neglect in academic scholarship, where it is frequently omitted from discussion of the Dogma 95 movement and he calls this omission “convenient scholarly amnesia” (Walters).

discussed her refusal to allow such a confusion of acting and non-acting to occur in the interview scenes:

Hassing: [A] lot of people have asked me if it's *me* as an actor or if it's me as the character Susanne, who is interviewed three weeks after the shooting. As far as I'm concerned, it *is* definitely as Susanne because I really wanted to keep things separate. . . .

Interviewer: Did you feel that Lars addressed himself to the character Susanne or were the questions directly addressed to you?

Hassing: Without doubt he asked me... and that's why I got confused...

Interviewer: So what you're saying is that there was sort of a fight between the two of you...he asked Louise Hassing and you answered as Susanne?

Hassing: Yes. (Oxholm and Nielsen 27-28)

Here Hassing explains her unwillingness to refuse acting when this was expected of her. Von Trier claims to the contrary that in the interview scenes it was the characters he was asking questions of and not the actors (Björkman 213-4). However, the fact that these interview scenes were unscripted, and the questions were asked by the director, who was outside of the diegetic universe of the film, may have prompted the confusion Hassing experienced. It appears that her experience making the film transformed her ideas about acting as she also discusses in the same interview that she believes refusing acting is necessary to be an actress: "It's gradually becoming clear to me that being an actress is about... *not* acting but *being*, but what's really becoming clear to me is that *just being* is damn hard work" (Oxholm and Nielsen 23). While Hassing could be describing Stanislavsky's method acting, fellow actor Jens Albinus is adamant that such an approach to acting was not possible while making the film: "Even though Dogma acting might look like method acting, it is something else. You cannot prepare yourself for the part; the fiction can only take shape here and now" (23).

In excerpts of von Trier's diary that he wrote while making the film and which appear in Jesper Jargil's documentary *The Humiliated* (*De ydmygede*, 1998) von Trier laments his actors' resistances to refusing acting:

I'd given a long speech to the cast before we started filming and stressed that the whole point of this film was *not* to perform. It was about forgetting most of what they knew about acting technique and performance. But the actors had been to drama school and had been taught that here was a story, and that a story needed to be told. In *The Idiots* they weren't supposed to be telling anything. They just had to exist and react in certain situations. Then, afterwards, I would construct the story and tell it. After rehearsing with them for a fortnight I thought we could let them loose. But they all started acting crazy in such an exaggerated way that the results were dreadful. (Björkman 212)¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ He also says: "How could I dream of getting an honest answer from young career-hungry actors? And who

Such resistance by his actors surely emerged out of the refusal of acting that von Trier deliberately aimed at. For example, in the scene with the intellectually disabled actors, it wasn't just the characters who felt uncomfortable spassing in their presence, but also the actors themselves. The actor Nikolaj Lie Kaas who played Jeppe in the film described his experience acting in this scene: "You simply forgot to stay in character. Suddenly, you couldn't see the project as something fantastic or interesting. Or even as a film. It was uncomfortable, and I guess necessary too. It didn't feel good. You felt like a complete idiot. You really felt that what we were doing was bungling and lying" (qtd. in Boatwright 62).

Another scene in which a refusal of acting is evident is in the 'gang bang' scene where the characters engage in a mass orgy. In these scenes professional porn actors were brought in to provide graphic close-up shots of real sexual acts.¹⁵⁵ Jerslev discusses the "indistinguishable mixture of performance and being" in this scene where the actors "dissociate themselves momentarily from both 'spas' [sic] and 'character' and turn into mere physical beings, their own biological beings. This is what makes the scene so disturbing" (58-59). Von Trier said: "There are people who are playing at being retarded and at the same time really fucking. That gives the scene precisely that little transgressive element it needs, and this film needs. I think that's important at all times" (von Trier 13). Spass translates in Danish as 'fun' and the joy connected to a refusal of acting is explored in scenes such as this. This scene had importance for von Trier as an expression of the sexual freedom that defined the early New Wave cinema of the 1960s: "The film is more about my longing for that period, which I obviously wasn't able to experience and take part in. But it was an era that promoted freedom and liberation on every level. We went into that wholeheartedly. Those nude scenes were fairly liberating! They were extremely important. And fun!" (qtd. in Björkman 216). He discussed the way the camera crew stripped off as well: "We loved it!" (216). The liberating effects of this refusal of acting via 'acting' the idiot, were felt by many involved in the making of the film who discussed how liberating it was to work within the Dogme rules.¹⁵⁶

the hell can see me as I really am? . . . The only one who really believes in this film or thought there was some reality in it, was me. But that's all right. . . . Since I'm the director, I have to believe in the film. Or my starting point must be that I'm doing the right thing. And that's why it's so bloody hard and I become a little child – when I realise this isn't reality, but acting. It's like a little game that little Lars has thought up – and it never becomes reality because the heart of the matter is – that we are 100% alone in our own tiny, ridiculous humiliating world" (*The Humiliated*). For a discussion of von Trier's diary and Jargil's documentary see Anne Jerslev, "Dogme 95, Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* and the 'Idiot Project.'" "

¹⁵⁵ While the actors themselves did not consummate sexual acts von Trier proudly reports that there were three erections amongst his actors (Björkman 217).

¹⁵⁶ Jens Albinus who plays Stoffer said of the film that "it is about freedom: freedom on different levels, in the fiction and also in the way the film was made" (Oxholm and Nielsen 26). Von Trier himself said: "Both Thomas

Ove Christiansen describes the way an exploration into ‘acting’ in everyday life is at the heart of *The Idiots*: “Basically the film is about role playing and being. What does it mean to be someone and what does it mean to pretend to be someone? Is being a consequence of acting or does acting make a disguise of an individual’s character? Is the individual a *persona*, a mask?” (40). ‘Persona’ in Latin means a mask through which an actor speaks. In Ingmar Bergman’s 1966 film *Persona*, which was released the same year as *The Chelsea Girls*, the character of Elisabet (acted by Liv Ullmann) stops acting part way through a performance of the title role in *Electra*, and then refuses to say a word to anyone, including her husband and child. Her refusal to ‘act’ in theatre and in life has been interpreted as a refusal of her ‘persona’ as actress as well as wife and mother and as a quest for authentic existence.¹⁵⁷ Elisabet’s act also triggers an emancipatory response in the female nurse who looks after her and in his film diary von Trier describes one conversation between Karen and Susanne in *The Idiots* as having “traces of *Persona*” (von Trier 10).

Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* (*Folie et Dérailson: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, 1961) describes the way mental illness has been historically defined as individuals unable or unwilling to participate in socially accepted behaviours. Karen’s ‘acting the idiot’ can be interpreted either way - either it is a conscious and therefore emancipatory refusal of ‘acting’ as lying, or she is a genuine intellectually disabled individual. Bodil Marie Thomsen takes up the later interpretation when she pathologises Karen stating that rather than choosing to refuse ‘acting’, “Karen is a true idiot who is unable to pretend” (Thomsen). Laakso, on the other hand, writes: “[V]on Trier, like Bergman, studies and questions madness as a form of performance. . . . Karen’s internal mental breakdown is transcended by her external performance of madness” (“DOGMATIC Iconoclasm” 43).¹⁵⁸ In this reading, Karen’s conscious decision to refuse the ‘acting’ of her bourgeois family and therefore, in Foucault’s terms, to be considered an ‘idiot’, puts her in the tradition of artists such as Artaud who refused the status-quo in his life and work and was ‘cast’ as a madman because of it. In this way, Karen’s acting the idiot is a true artistic performance.

Vinterberg and I think this was the most fun we’d had with films so far” (Björkman 203). He claimed that, “*The Idiots* was a liberation from aesthetics” (215). He also described the way, “trying to get closer to the actors’ anxieties and sorrow and internal conflicts. The sort of thing you dream of doing but never have time for. But here we had time” (209).

¹⁵⁷ See Hanna Laakso’s essay “DOGMATIC Iconoclasm: Performative Aspects of Realism and Excess in Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots*” and Susan Sontag’s essay about *Persona*, where she compares Elisabet’s act to suicide (“Persona: The Film in Depth” 79).

¹⁵⁸ Laakso uses Goffman’s analysis in *Behavior in Public Places* to describe Karen’s spassing at the end of the film as an example of where “the refuser rejects the other’s claim to membership in the gathering and the social occasion in which the gathering occurs” (Goffman qtd. in Laakso, “DOGMATIC Iconoclasm” 37).

In his film diary von Trier writes, “It is so wonderful that the Dogme rules have damned aesthetics to hell” (Jerslev 46).¹⁵⁹ This idea of being liberated from aesthetics – that the aesthetic is something false like acting (and like the devil), that needs to be revolted against in favour of the ethical, was first discussed by Søren Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* (*Enten – Eller*, 1843).¹⁶⁰ What Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Baudrillard and Žižek all explore is that real life that formerly was the realm of the ethical, has now become aesthetic. And so it may be that the aesthetic and the ethical have swapped places – that it is in acting and pretending and in madness, that something ethical or truthful might be found. In her discussion of *The Idiots*, Bodil Marie Thompson considers that a simulated or aesthetic world demands “ethical questions [which] become relevant in a digital world that otherwise makes each and every simulacrum possible” (Thompson). A simulated life is refused by acting, in a reversal of the refusal of acting in an authentic life.

I’m Still Here (2010) Casey Affleck

In 2008, Joaquin Phoenix, a successful Hollywood actor in films such as *Gladiator* (2000) and *Walk the Line* (2005), announced during a media interview that he was ending his career as an actor and beginning a new career as a hip-hop artist. He also announced that this was being documented in a film directed by his friend Casey Affleck. *I’m Still Here* was released two years later. It follows Phoenix’s desire to refuse acting in the search for a more authentic existence. It begins with home video camera footage dated 1981 Huigra, Panama, of a young boy jumping off a waterfall. The way it is framed, the act of jumping into the water is staged like a performance for a man, perhaps the father, who is in the frame and spectator to the event. Phoenix was born in Puerto Rico and travelled around Central America as a child. Combined with the backstory to the documentary, this is presented as home video footage of Phoenix as a child. This is followed by a clip from a newsreel of Phoenix and his brothers and sisters as children busking on the street singing “I’m Gonna Make it”, a song about becoming famous, successful and rich, again for a camera and where the spectator to the film is positioned along with the spectators to the event. This shot is

¹⁵⁹ This is also expressed in the supreme goal/pledge of the Dogma manifesto: “[T]o force the truth out of my characters and settings, by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and aesthetic conventions” (von Trier and Vinterberg).

¹⁶⁰ Brusteian discussed this problematic in general terms in *The Theatre of Revolt*: “The conflict between reality and the imagination is the conflict between the ethical and aesthetic views of life; and it is the pivot of the modern theatre” (416). Brusteian also describes Genet’s well-known phrase “the only criterion of an act is its elegance” as “very close to aestheticism” (381).

followed by a split screen collage of shots from Phoenix's life as a famous and successful adult celebrity actor, with news footage from red carpet appearances, award shows and talk show interviews. The editing draws attention to the repetition of Phoenix's answers in these interviews. The film so far shows the way Phoenix has developed as an actor in life learning to perform for the camera since early childhood. It suggests that his Hollywood celebrity persona is a role that he plays - something staged for the camera and in the pursuit of capitalist success.

The next shot is of Phoenix in the present. The footage is at night, his back is turned to the camera, he is wearing a hoodie and we don't see his face for several minutes. In contrast to the previous footage, this can be seen as a demonstration of his decision to refuse to act for the camera. Throughout this shot he delivers the following monologue:

I'm just fuckin' like stuck in this, ridiculous like, self imposed fuckin' prison of ah characterization, you know, and it happened to me young. It's like the chicken or the egg, I don't know what came first, whether they said, um that I was emotional and intense and complicated, or whether I... or whether I was, truly complicated and intense, and then they responded to it, then like, when they responded to it, then I responded to what they were saying. And yeah I utilized it in some ways, and there's... I am embarrassed about that and that's what a lot of this is about. I mean I guess that's why I agreed to do this documentary, is because, I don't wanna... I don't wanna play the character of Joaquin anymore, like, I wanna be whatever I am. And my artistic output thus far when I'm really fuckin' honest with myself, has been fuckin' fraudulent. And now for the first time I'm doing something, whether you like it or not, it really represents me. And maybe that's fuckin' stupid, to want to be represented, to care, I don't care, it's not that, but I don't wanna be, you know... think what you want about me, hate me or like me, just don't misunderstand me... that's it.

The "characterization" that Phoenix is sick of and determined to refuse refers not only the roles he acts in films but principally to the role he 'acts' in his everyday life as a celebrity. Here, rather than the smooth and attractive celebrity as he appears in the previous footage, we see that he has radically altered his appearance. His hair is long, he has grown a beard, put on weight and wears dark glasses. This covering up of himself can be seen as an expression of his refusal to act, perhaps similar to Nico's when she deliberately refused the image of "blonde" Superstar. The documentary is positioned as a truthful depiction of the real Phoenix who has stripped the veneer of 'acting' away.

Phoenix's crisis of identity has parallels in this way to Gründgens' crisis at the beginning of *Faust Chroma*. In *I'm Still Here* Phoenix likens acting in Hollywood film to being a puppet (which can also be compared to the use of the puppet motif in *Faust Chroma*):

We talk about it being this creative expression, but really you're just a dumb fuckin' puppet. You're this dumb fuckin' doll that wears what someone else tells you to wear, stands where someone else tells you to stand, says what somebody else tells you to say, that's not expression, that's not creativity, and I have more to offer than that.

One of the recent Hollywood films he may be referring to, which features in the opening sequence of award show highlights, is *Walk The Line*, a biopic about the real life singer Johnny Cash. In a key scene in *Walk The Line*, Cash (played by Phoenix) is challenged by his potential manager to stop singing what he thinks people want to hear and “sing something real”. This is an example of Hollywood’s depiction of truth and authenticity. Phoenix, in *I’m Still Here*, seems to be saying that scenes such as this are fraudulent because they demanded that he be a “dumb fuckin’ puppet”. He (and Affleck) are criticising Hollywood’s construction of an illusion of truth and authenticity, which in reality is based on acting (pretending). Throughout his voiceover sequence Phoenix is shown rescuing a little bird who has flown indoors, and setting it free. This action is metaphorically equated with his desire to liberate himself from acting in film and in life so that he can live a life that is authentic and truthful and free. It is this refusal of acting that is set up to be documented in the film.¹⁶¹

It is meaningful that in his acting life in *Walk The Line* Phoenix has pretended to be a musician, and that now in his real life he states that he wants to be one. The film that was widely connected to Phoenix’s refusal of Hollywood however was *Two Lovers*, which he was promoting during the making of his documentary with Affleck. In *Two Lovers* (where true to form he plays an “intense and complicated” character) and which also stars Gwyneth Paltrow, there is a scene where as his character Phoenix performs a mock imitation of a rapper in an attempt to impress one of his lovers. In this scene the mock imitation of hip hop functions as a gag to reinvest the narrative and the acting within the film as something authentic. It is perhaps significant therefore that Phoenix takes up the form of rapping in particular in *I’m Still Here* as his antidote to the falseness of acting in Hollywood film. Rap has also existed historically in opposition, as an expression of refusal and defiance by black American artists against hegemonic white mainstream culture. It is also an art form where

¹⁶¹ Phoenix participated in a 2005 documentary *I’m Still Here: Real Diaries of Young People Who Lived During the Holocaust* where the real life diaries of young Jews in the Holocaust were read out by actors. By using the same name for this film Affleck and Phoenix may be equating the survivors of the Holocaust with Phoenix himself as a survivor of Hollywood. In doing so this would also (in the way The Actor’s Gang did in their production of *Mephisto*) be making a correlation between the acting demanded in Hollywood and that required by the regime of the Nazis.

rappers write and perform their own often spontaneous lyrics rather than acting and pretending somebody else's.¹⁶²

As in *The Idiots*, Phoenix's desire in *I'm Still Here* to refuse acting is reflected in the form of the film itself. It was also a low budget film, most of the camerawork was done by Affleck himself and it was shot in their own homes. Affleck is Phoenix's long time friend, and Phoenix's other friends are in many of the scenes. While most Hollywood films are shot in twelve weeks, this film was shot over two years, a much longer period of time. Over this period they appear to have documented themselves on home video in excerpts from their everyday lives, although footage is sourced from several media. One of the most notorious scenes in the film is footage from a television interview Phoenix did on the David Letterman Show. In this interview, Phoenix displays a refusal to 'act' in the way that's expected of him, as a funny charismatic celebrity. His refusal to please elicits a hostile response from Letterman who is clearly enraged and unsettled. This interview received a lot of media attention.

Much of the footage in the film documents the way Phoenix's decision to quit acting and become a rapper was considered by many to be a hoax – an act that was pretended by Phoenix and Affleck. Excerpts from parodies of Phoenix's performance on Letterman (for example, Ben Stiller's parody at the Academy Awards) function within the film as examples of the industry insisting on Phoenix's behaviour as fake. They are examples also of the very persistent rumours that had been circulating in the media since Phoenix first announced his retirement from acting, that their documentary was a hoax and a gimmick. There was a desire to categorise *I'm Still Here* along the lines of a film such as *Borat* (2006) or *Brüno* (2009), films where celebrity actor Sacha Baron Cohen puts on a character and acts out a role and takes it out into everyday life in order to offend and provoke people for the entertainment of self-satisfied middle-class audiences – much like the early reality television show *Candid Camera*. These rumours and parodies that surrounded Phoenix's refusal of acting were expressions of the media's attempt to defend the industry of Hollywood and neuter the threat that his refusal to act provoked even before the film was released. In the film Phoenix gets more and more upset about these accusations and defiant in his refusal of acting.

¹⁶² *I'm Still Here* has similarities to *Somewhere* by Sofia Coppola, which came out a few months later. *Somewhere* is also about a male celebrity actor and his disillusionment with acting in Hollywood and 'acting' in his own life. But in this film, the male actor Stephen Dorff doesn't appear as himself, he plays a character called Johnny Marco. In the film Johnny Marco is asked, "Who is Johnny Marco?" His identity is being questioned. But because it is a question asked of a character, and not of the actor himself like in *I'm Still Here*, the question remains within the confines of the fictional world of the film.

I'm Still Here was released at the 2010 Venice film Festival. A week later Affleck announced to *The New York Times* that, rather than a documentary as they had been claiming, it was in fact a fictional film where Phoenix was not refusing acting but rather had been acting and pretending all along:

The idea that Joaquin was really retiring for good and pursuing a rap career in earnest was an act. . . . I was making a movie. In a movie we try to deceive. In theatres, as they say, the deceived are the wisest. I was trying to help the audience suspend their disbelief. That is why the film was released without comment from myself or anyone involved. The reason it was MADE without comment and with Joaquin in character when in public was because the media plays a role in the film and the media would not have played their role as well as they did had it been acknowledged that Joaquin was only performing. (Ebert)

In this announcement Affleck claims that Phoenix was acting and lying the whole time he was purporting to refuse acting in a search for something authentic and truthful. Phoenix reiterated Affleck's announcement discussing the way they "wanted to do a different, original comedy. Our initial pitch was very poor: I would solemnly declare that I was retiring from acting to do hip-hop and we would see what would be going on from that" (Séguret).¹⁶³ He continued: "I insist on the fact that the film is very written and very played, even if it is improvisation. This is not a documentary. . . . [E]verything is false. . . . Even if it's true that in some ways the film made me change under the eye of the camera. . . . Casey wrote most of the scenes and dialogues" (Séguret).

If they are taken at their word, and if as Phoenix says, the motivation for the film was to make a comedy, it must be assumed he means in the direction of *Brüno* and *Borat* where celebrity actor Sasha Baron Cohen is filmed taking on different personas in everyday life situations. However Phoenix is adamant this is not the case: "For us, this is not a 'mockumentary', this is not a 'hoax', this is not *Brüno*" (Séguret). Affleck tried to distance the film from *Brüno* and *Borat* type films by talking about it as performance art. Gary Thompson describes the film as "a less imaginative version of Banksy's meta-documentary about the art world *Exit Through The Gift Shop* (2010) (Thompson). Importantly however, Banksy never came out and said his film, and his identity within it, was just an act, as Phoenix and Affleck did, which prevents *I'm Still Here* from being classified as performance art.

¹⁶³ An advertisement of the musical *The Producers* appears in the corner of one shot of *I'm Still Here*, perhaps a hint to the audience by the filmmakers, of the deceptive intentions of the Phoenix and Affleck, the two main collaborators.

Another possibility is that in revealing the film's premise as a lie, the filmmakers were acquiescing to the enormous pressure on them from the production company Magnolia, from the media who gave them resoundingly bad reviews, from their friends and family and perhaps out of pressure they put on themselves - to sell the film and attract audiences.¹⁶⁴ To do so they had to retract their refusal of the conventions of Hollywood and of the 'acting' expected of Phoenix in everyday life. For example, Affleck said: "There was a lot at stake financially and, if we had left it there [not told the media it was all acting], it would have been very damaging to Joaquin's career" (qtd. in Howden 278).

The problem is that by professing the falseness and pretence of their film project, the quite radical refusals of acting in *I'm Still Here*, the kernel of the film's supposed impetus and inspiration – the desire to give up acting as a rejection of the falseness of Hollywood – is revealed as a lie. This refusal of acting is ultimately disavowed and taken back and even apologised for by Affleck and Phoenix in an effort to promote the film and to secure their careers in Hollywood.¹⁶⁵ In claiming that they were acting and lying and in their efforts to explain *I'm Still Here* as a fictional film, Phoenix and Affleck significantly reduce the impact of the film for an audience as a refusal of acting. For example, when Phoenix insists that everything was scripted by Affleck as the director, this positions Phoenix ironically as close to the kind of "dumb fuckin' puppet" he rejects in the film - someone who "wears what someone else wants you to wear, says what someone else tells you to say, stands where someone else tells you to stand".

Affleck defended his film by saying: "Isn't it the job of the director to figure out the best way to tell the story they have to tell? This was the best way I could think of to tell this story, about this character" (Ebert). In another interview he deliberately stresses the acting involved in shooting: "There were multiple takes, these are performances. . . . When we were not rolling he [Phoenix] was out of character. If he was in public he had to behave in a way that didn't contradict the character's personality" (Ebert). However, if the film was about a

¹⁶⁴ *USA Today* wrote: "Let's hope that *I'm Still Here*... is a hoax or some brand of cinematic performance art. Otherwise, it's an annoying, exploitative and disturbingly voyeuristic excuse for a film. And whether truth or folly, it's not particularly well made" (qtd. in Howden 275).

¹⁶⁵ One example of this is in an interview when Phoenix retracts his rejection in the film of the "fraudulent" films he has made up until this point, in particular the film *Two Lovers* which he was promoting during the period of filming *I'm Still Here*. In explaining his appearance on Letterman he says: "I was painted into a corner and I had no choice. I either had to give up on this thing that I had already been shooting for six months, or do what I did. James [the director of *Two Lovers*] knew what was happening. And of course, it makes me feel terrible if it did affect *Two Lovers* in any negative way, because obviously I have a great deal of admiration and love for James and for his work, and I would never want my personal stuff to get in the way of a film. It was a tough situation" (Winter).

character as he says then why didn't he direct Phoenix to play a character as Phoenix did in *Walk The Line*? Why use Phoenix's real name? Why shoot it at his house? Why make him play the role in real life situations and deliberately confuse the distinction between acting and living? In some interviews Affleck appears confused about how to talk about the film. When he is asked if Phoenix's acting is an act he answers: "Some of it, definitely. It's hard to say which parts now" (J. Nelson). When asked if the film was real, he responded: "I've never said the film wasn't real. It's completely real. You feel for the guy. Like he says, 'Like me or hate me just don't misunderstand me'. There's a truth to that. . . . I think it makes people feel more comfortable to believe it's not real. That none of it happened. That Joaquin is nothing like how we see him on screen. It is easier because we don't have to invest in him as much" (J. Nelson). He admits that there was confusion on the set of the film as to whether Phoenix was acting or not acting:

Well, there were some who did think that what was happening was real, even people on the crew. And that did two things, really. It made for some really great reactions and a genuinely tense environment on the set that we needed. It created confusion for some people. Real emotions came into play. Nobody was hurt and everyone was told what was happening, but, honestly, Joaquin was so believable at times and so committed and so relentlessly in character that people got confused. And it was my job to help create sustain or squash that confusion when the scene we were shooting demanded it. And that created more confusion. But that too was a performance because the film is in part about a man and his relationship to the people making a film about him. (qtd. in Howden 271-72)

Affleck is caught here between insisting that the film is a contrived performance and acknowledging that a deliberate refusal of acting took place.

The refusal of acting that occurs in *I'm Still Here* is fundamentally and deliberately denied and evaded by Affleck and Phoenix in their interviews after the release of the film. After the film came out Phoenix returned to the David Letterman show and apologised for his earlier appearance saying that he meant no offence and that he thought Letterman would be able to tell the difference between a real person and a character. When asked about his scene with Letterman in *I'm Still Here* by *Interview* magazine Phoenix said: "I can't ever really say all the different things that were involved, so I can't give you an accurate description of what I felt and why. There was a lot going on . . . I can't really talk about it, but I was just so relieved that we were finally able to go and not lie. I don't like lying – I really don't. So I just felt so relieved to be able to talk about it" (qtd. in Mitchell 154).¹⁶⁶ In a complete reversal, his

¹⁶⁶ In a 2012 interview with *Interview Magazine* (the magazine Warhol founded) Phoenix is asked if he's

performance in the film where he speaks about the lies of Hollywood acting, he now claims as a lie as well. Again, if it *was* a performance, why didn't he just call himself a performance artist? This is what Andy Kaufman did when he appeared on Letterman in 1980.¹⁶⁷ Affleck said that he and Phoenix used Andy Kaufman's appearances on Letterman as inspiration: "We watched them together. . . . But this was different. That was performance art. This was part of a movie" (qtd. in Ebert).

However, if Phoenix's appearance was part of a fictional movie (like the spassing in *The Idiots* when they did location shooting) as both Phoenix and Affleck attest, then Letterman would have known it was acting and been in on the joke (hoax), but he wasn't. Letterman was completely at ease with Kaufman, because Kaufman presented himself as a stand up comic. When Phoenix says that he didn't like lying to Letterman, what he may have meant, even subconsciously, is that he didn't like to refuse and upset the conventions that were set up for him. When Roger Ebert, who reviewed the film believing it was a documentary, suggested to Affleck in a later interview that Phoenix must have been urgently inspired to make a statement, Affleck is evasive: "I think it's more a case of an enormous talent relishing the unique role and broadened parameters of the job" (qtd. in Ebert).

Even if, as Affleck says, Phoenix came out of character immediately each time the camera was turned off, even if Phoenix was deliberately acting, the fact that he took this acting into everyday life and everyday situations, turned his 'acting' into real life actions in which real refusals of 'acting' took place. Affleck says that all the scenes, such as, for example, a scene with hookers, were deliberately staged for the camera.¹⁶⁸ However, in the scenes in the film where the acting goes into everyday life like on Letterman, there is a very real confusion and blurring for Phoenix between acting and reality. In *Man, Play and Games* (1958), Roger Caillois talks about what he calls alienation. He says that alienation is produced when "simulation is no longer accepted as such, when the one who is disguised believes that his role, travesty, or mask is real. He no longer *plays another*. Persuaded that he is the other, he behaves as if he were, forgetting his own self" (49). Even if Phoenix believed he was acting and pretending in the film, he appears to be in denial about the way reality started to impinge into this acting and started to blur the boundary for him between art and life. When he quit his career as an actor to try his luck at hip hop, he did that not only in the

looking for honesty. Phoenix replies, "In terms of acting?" The interviewer responds, "Yeah." Phoenix answers, "Because sexually, no, I'm not. . . . But in terms of acting? Please lie to me... No, yeah, of course." (Mitchell 48)

¹⁶⁷ See "Andy Kaufman on Letterman (June 24th 1980)." *Youtube*.

¹⁶⁸ He says the waterfall scene at the beginning was also staged with actors.

scenes in the film, he also did it in his everyday life and this ‘acting’ had real consequences.¹⁶⁹

There are several scenes in the film where Phoenix’s acting may be an example of what Caillois describes. One is after Phoenix’s appearance on Letterman. He appears distraught and shocked: “I’ve fucked my fucking life”. His response may be good method acting, but it may also be a response to the genuine reality that by sabotaging the media interview he may have destroyed his chances to revive his cinematic career as an actor in Hollywood. Playing this role in real life and refusing to act in the way Letterman expected had the very real potential to be career suicide.¹⁷⁰ In another scene in the film Phoenix performs in a concert after two years of appearing in public and on camera in this role. After several minutes of jeering from the crowd one heckler provokes Phoenix to plunge into the throng of audience members and he becomes embroiled in a brawl after which he vomits while being led away by security staff. In a 2012 interview Phoenix described, “the terror of getting up on the stage knowing that I’ve got to get to the song and then start having a fight and then jumping into the crowd and nobody knows . . . That was one of the most intense things I’ve ever done in my life. I was shaking. But it was an incredible feeling” (Mitchell 154). His rapping in this scene and the brawl that followed may have been staged and intentional as he claims, but what may also have occurred is that in this moment, the role that Phoenix played became indistinguishable from his real life. His reaction to the heckler in this scene, like Ondine’s reaction to Rona in *The Chelsea Girls*, can also be read as a genuine response to the accusation that he was a liar and a fake.

Phoenix alluded to his desire to refuse acting in an interview for his next film *The Master* when he reflected back on his performance in *I’m Still Here*:

Once I became a total buffoon, it was so liberating. I’d see child actors and I’d get so jealous, because they’re just completely wide open. If you could convince them that something frightening was going to happen, they would actually feel terror. I wanted to feel that so badly. I’d just been acting too long, and it had kind of been ruined for

¹⁶⁹ Phoenix talks about his inspiration to do the film when reflecting on the current industry, where “everybody plays themselves. I mean, *Ellen*! *Ellen* was called *Ellen*. But it’s not them; it’s a distorted version of them. There was something so exciting about saying, ‘This is me, but now I get to make ‘me’ whatever I want it to be’. . . . I also got really fascinated by reality shows, particularly celebrity reality shows, like *Celebrity Rehab*. Frankly, it was some of the best acting I’d ever seen some of these people do. It’s so obvious that it’s manipulated and such total bulls--, and yet there’s something so terribly exciting about that, so dangerous and ugly and scary and fantastic!” (Winter).

¹⁷⁰ Phoenix continued to play this role with the media, to a lesser extent, after the film came out. For example, he displays the same refusal of acting in media interviews as Warhol did, when in an interview with *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 2012 he said: “I think you should just write the interview that you’d like and I approve it” (Maddox). Here he (intentionally or not) mimics the famous Warhol interview when Warhol told his interviewer “I mean, you should just tell me the words and I can just repeat them” (*Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film*).

me. I wanted to put myself in a situation that would feel brand-new and hopefully inspire a new way of approaching acting. It did do that for me. (Winter)

Here Phoenix identifies his desire to act in the film with child actors who cannot distinguish between acting and reality. This is exactly the sentiment he expressed in *I'm Still Here*, which he now distances himself from. Playing the role of a “buffoon” was perhaps, like spassing in *The Idiots*, a way of accessing truth, but this became confusing for Phoenix when this experiment (at least in its making) was taken into everyday life rather than remaining in the diegetic of a fictional film.¹⁷¹ Caillois describes what occurs when fantasy and reality are blurred: “The time arrives when the alienated one – who has become another – tries desperately to deny, subdue, or destroy this new self, which strongly resists, and which he regards as inadmissible, inconceivable, and irksome” (49). Phoenix’s refusal after the release of the film, to acknowledge the sincerity of his acts of refusal within it, reflects this denial that Caillois describes.

Phoenix’s refusal of acting was received initially by the media and public as evidence of a mental breakdown or hoax. Both of these interpretations refuse to acknowledge Phoenix’s professed intention in the film to refuse acting both in theatre and in life and both interpretations meant his refusal was leading effectively to career suicide. The end of the film shows Phoenix walking with his back to the camera, deeper and deeper into a stream until he is completely submerged – an ultimate refusal of acting and living.¹⁷² But in his and the film’s resurfacing into the marketplace, the filmmakers’ desires to preserve their careers in Hollywood may have ensured that acting and lying won out over their desire to refuse it.

¹⁷¹ *The Master* is significant also for the role that Phoenix acts in the film, a protagonist searching for the truth and finding it in the religion of Scientology.

¹⁷² Reminiscent of Elisabet in *Persona*, in the last scenes in the film Phoenix stops talking entirely. There is however, an alternate ending where Phoenix re-emerges and makes jokes with the camera operators.

Conclusion

As part of a 2010 exhibition of her work at the Museum of Modern Art, performance artist Marina Abramović presented a performance titled “Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present”. In a film of the same name documenting the making of the exhibition and the performance Abramović dresses up as a devil for a photo shoot. She explains that she is recreating a photo of herself taken as a child at a dress up party: “My mother dressed me as a devil when I was four years old. . . . I have no idea why she dressed me as a devil. I think that marked my life”. In her career as a performance artist Abramović has often associated herself with the devil. For example, in her 1975 performance “Thomas Lips” she carved a pentagram into her stomach with a knife. Abramović has also embraced the erotic in her work. In the documentary Abramović is shown dancing the tango as the curator of the exhibition (and her ex-husband) Klaus Biesenbach speaks in voice over specifically about her ability to seduce:

Marina seduces everybody she ever meets. But that’s not the case for me because I went through that process and now we are divorced. We are great friends but we are divorced. So she would never try to seduce me because we are divorced. With Marina I always try to subtract the performer from the person I have a working relationship with. And I try to deal with her as if she was a sculptor. I look at her work as if it were an object. I try to be incredibly matter of fact with her. Because I don’t want her performance... persona, to get into the way. Because with Marina, she’s never not performing. (*Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*)

By describing her as a seducer and performer in life Biesenbach may suggest that Abramović is a liar and pretender like the devil, from whom he must distance himself in order to remain objective and truthful. Although Biesenbach is careful to make the distinction between acting and performing in her performance at MoMA: “The risk at the MoMA exhibition will be how far it goes into being theatrical. Marina often says there’s a difference. When you perform you have a knife and it’s your blood. When you’re acting it’s ketchup and you don’t cut yourself. If we lose that in the MoMA performance, if it’s just a fake knife and ketchup, then we lost” (*Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*). He stresses the truthfulness of Abramović in performance, where she performs real and not pretended actions.

However, what is not acknowledged by Biesenbach and what is central to Abramović’s performance of “Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present”, is that she refuses not only acting but performing as well. Running for ninety days over a three-month period, her performance consisted of her doing nothing except sitting in a chair and staring into the eyes of museumgoers who lined up for the opportunity to sit one at a time in a chair opposite

her. She explains her aims in the documentary: “The proposition here is just [to] empty self. To be able to be in the present time, with your mind here and now” and “It’s really, performance becomes life itself. . . . It is demanding all of you because there is no story anymore to tell there’s no objects to hide behind, there’s nothing, there’s just pure presence, [you have to] rely on your own energy, and nothing else”. The performance was widely documented to have provoked quite profound emotional responses in its audiences (Scott, “Artist’s Fearless Aura, in Film, Chair or Tub”).¹⁷³ This can be seen as a response to the way her refusal to act and perform confronted the audience members with their own act or performance in front of her. In the refusal of acting and performing, the artist/actor/performer became the observer and the spectator was forced to see him/herself as an actor or performer in life. Abramović describes this experience for an audience: “When they’re sitting in front of me it’s not about me anymore, because very soon I’m just a mirror of their own self” (*Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*). The first rule in her recent manifesto is: “An artist should not lie to himself or to others” (*Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*). In her performance at MoMA the liars are revealed to be in the audience and this is a complete reversal of the anti-theatrical prejudice. We the audience are now the ‘devils’.¹⁷⁴

I began this thesis by looking at the history of the desire to refuse acting as a refusal of the aesthetic as against the ethical (moral). The seductive nature of acting in the theatre has meant that it has been seen as a threat to the ethical, in particular the morals and authority of religion. I detailed the tradition in Christian culture where actors have been likened to the devil who embraces acting and pretending to seduce people away from God. And to Nietzsche acting was a threat to the ethics of living a truthful life without lying and pretending. But the deep suspicions about acting have also been directly connected to the confusion of acting (pretending) and real action, i.e. a confusion of the aesthetic and the ethical. What Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Goffman, Benjamin, Debord, Baudrillard and Žižek all describe is a world in which acting in the theatre (and more recently film and television) has become so life-like that it is indistinguishable from life, and where life itself has become a simulation of acting. The place of the aesthetic is now seen by some to be in everyday life

¹⁷³ Tilda Swinton’s appearance in a restaging of *The Maybe* three years later at MoMA may have been prompted by the success of Abramović’s performance.

¹⁷⁴ Schechner in “The Conservative Avant-garde” (2013) uses Abramović’s performance at MoMA as an example of the way “today’s avant-garde inhabits the already known, marketed as fitting into specific categories or brands” (897). However, I think Schechner is perhaps blinded by the popular success of the exhibition and ignores what is avant-garde about her performance. Having said that in his 1990 interview about Warhol, Baudrillard noted that “Simulation has been all the rage in the art world in recent years” (“Starting From Andy Warhol” 47). Since her MoMA exhibition Abramović has begun collaborating with Lady Gaga, for example, on her album *Artpop*. Lady Gaga cites Warhol as her inspiration in her life and art.

whereas the ethical can be found in performance. And so in a reversal of the anti-theatrical prejudice, theatre and film - the enclaves of acting and pretending – have become places where acting is now being refused. As Barish observes, “the antitheatrical prejudice, tenacious, elusive and protean in its own right, and springing, as it seems, from the deepest core of our being, seems to have taken refuge in the theater itself” (475). One explanation that I have explored in this thesis is that this has occurred in response to the perception that everyday life has become a series of acting roles – that refusing acting in the theatre functions as an antidote and way of refusing ‘acting’ and simulation in everyday life.

In this thesis I have looked at some more recent theatrical and filmic works that examined the desire to refuse acting that has emerged from the confusion of the aesthetic and the ethical or, of acting and living. In my first chapter I looked at three works, which explore a refusal of acting in the context of fascist theatricality; where political life in Nazi Germany was seen by some as a theatrical spectacle, politicians behaved as actors and actors behaved as politicians. In Szabò’s *Mephisto*, Höfgen (Gründgens) is shown attempting unsuccessfully to claim the ethical position by insisting on a separation between the aesthetic and the political but ultimately comes to realise that the aesthetic is always political. In Free Theatre’s adaptation of Fritsch’s play *Faust Chroma*, Gründgens re-experiences his seduction by the devil (Nazis) and turns to suicide as the only way to refuse his ‘acting’ life. Whether he is martyring himself in search of the ethical or simply going to hell, Fritsch does not make clear. And in *Enigma Emmy Göring* Emmy is represented refusing the aesthetic of acting in the theatre in favour of an ethical life married to the Head of the Luftwaffe, ending up in an aesthetical “distraction camp”.

In my second chapter I looked at works that equate sexual role-play with the performance of power in society. In *The Balcony* Genet uses sexual role-playing and pretending in the brothel/theatre to expose and refuse the sexual (sado-masochistic) role-playing of figures of authority in society. In this way he uses the aesthetic of acting as an ethical tool to expose the aesthetics of institutions of authority in everyday life. I discussed how Falkenberg’s devising and directing of *Distraction Camp* integrated Genet’s embrace of acting with Artaud’s refusal of it. The ethical questions the production asked were integrated into an aesthetic of refusal. Ang Lee used acting in his film *Lust, Caution* to explore the consequences of theatrical sexual role-playing when it is taken out into and refused in actual life.

In my third chapter I looked at films that attempt to refuse acting entirely. In doing so, Warhol reveals in *The Chelsea Girls* the way filmic role-playing is inextricably linked to

role-playing in life. This echoes Barish's observation about modern life, that "To behave authentically is to perform 'acts' " (476). Von Trier and Affleck, however, are not satisfied with the 'acting' roles proffered by society. *The Idiots* represents a refusal of 'acting' in everyday life in an uncompromising demand for the ethical, taking the aesthetic of role-playing the idiot into everyday life situations as a tool to do so. In doing so the film exposes the ethical realm as aesthetic, which in turn relegates acting in this context to the ethical position. Von Trier celebrated the Dogme 95 rules for having "damned aesthetics to hell". *I'm Still Here* would appear to refuse acting and role-playing entirely, yet the aesthetic of acting and pretending surfaces almost immediately in the public's (and filmmakers') reception to the film, as the only possibility. All three films in this chapter have been criticised for aesthetic reasons, yet I argue that their power both to entertain and to inflame is in their revelation of the way the traditionally ethical realm of everyday life has become an aesthetic category.

Facebook, online blogs and other recent social media such as Twitter, Snapchat and various messaging apps, have become vehicles in which we have all become 'actors'. Facebook for example, currently the most used of these medias, enables us to construct an image and identity for ourselves and to collect friends as a kind of fan base who acknowledge these creations. Here, ordinary people can leap to "Superstar" status. Ty Burr writes that Warhol's screen tests anticipated "our current era of webcams and Facebook pages. You make a Warhol screen test whenever you sit down for a video chat" (202). Perhaps we are all living as if there is a camera recording our everyday activities because, increasingly, there always is. Goffman notes the way that while we may think we dwell in a moral world, we use the amoral tool of performance to convince ourselves of this (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* 251).¹⁷⁵ The simultaneous development of our surveillance society has enabled intensive spying on each other, which has become part of our social lives and is a powerful tool of conformity and self-censorship as Joshua Gamson notes: "Many of us, with or without celebrity status, seem to be learning to do what Mark Andrejevic has called 'the work of being watched,' induced by heightened surveillance" (1068). While the desire to refuse and opt out of this 'acting' life exists, simulation seems perhaps the only reality we have. To not participate in or to refuse to participate in this simulated society is to not 'exist'.¹⁷⁶ Suicide featured in many of the works I examined in this thesis as an example of the ultimate and

¹⁷⁵ Goffman describes the way "As performers we are merchants of morality" (251).

¹⁷⁶ Phoenix may have discovered this in *I'm Still Here*. In Spike Jonze's just released film *Her* (2013), Phoenix again explores simulation when he plays a man who falls in love with his computer operating system.

perhaps the only refusal of ‘acting’ in life. Suicide and terrorism (at least in the moment of it) are shown as the only places left to us where we can refuse acting (pretending).

That is, aside from in performance. Lefebvre suggests that the aesthetic is necessary in order for the ethical to exist at all: “If there were no roles to play, and thus no familiarity, how could the cultural element or ethical element which should modify and humanize our emotions and our passions be introduced into life?” (15). If to refuse lying and pretending is to take up an ethical position, then surely the ‘idiots’ or artists in society should be our new Gods? Yet this is not the case. Such refusals of ‘acting’ are a direct threat to the authorities who depend upon it to maintain control over the masses. These authorities are no longer just Christian, but followers of our new religion of global Capitalism. Their industries are deeply engaged in seducing us all into “selling our souls to the devil” in order to become full time actors in consumer society.¹⁷⁷

As an actor I played the devil in Free Theatre’s *Faust Chroma* as well as in a later production, *Doctor Faustus* (2010). This has allowed me to engage with what it means to be a woman in society where to be seductive often means being considered a ‘slut’ (perhaps the most common secular incarnation of the devil). Acting in the theatre has also allowed me to analyse my own confusion between acting and living. In my experience playing the role of Emmy Göring in *Enigma Emmy Göring* and Nico in *Nico: Sphinx of Ice*, I was able to act the roles of two very different femininities side by side. I was surprised how much I enjoyed acting as a ‘Gretchen’ type woman when I played Emmy. Halfway through the second performance of *Enigma Emmy Göring* however, I froze. My mind went completely blank and my body went numb. In the theatre this is known as corpsing, and this term is appropriate for the way I felt like I was becoming paralysed and completely detached from my body. This lasted perhaps a minute during which time I had visions of myself running from the theatre, before I remembered some text from the play and continued acting. It was a deeply disturbing and upsetting experience, a refusal of acting, but what did it mean?

In my everyday life I refuse to play the role of the “sweet blonde” such as Emmy represents and behave in a way much closer to that of Nico who embodies what is considered to be distinctly masculine traits – her deep voice the result of her refusal to play the archetypal blonde. I had always assumed that in my refusal of the “sweet blonde” role in life I was somehow more genuine or authentic. Yet in allowing myself to really inhabit the role as Emmy in the theatre I became aware of my desire for what I had previously considered

¹⁷⁷ In a Free Theatre production of *Doctor Faustus* in 2010, this analogy was explored.

lying and pretending. In the context of this joint production, through acting the role of Emmy and Nico side by side, I became aware that both types of femininities were acting roles, that Nico's femininity was not somehow more authentic or neutral than Emmy's. I was confronted with the question of why I had not chosen to play a role like Emmy's in life, and also, what the consequences were of the roles I *did* act in life that I had previously believed were authentic and ethical? Perhaps my freeze was a Christian puritan refusal of acting, out of fear that like Gründgens and like Emmy, I may have no true authentic identity to return to - that I too am simply an actor (pretender). Refusing to act in the theatre became the place where I was confronted with the ethical consequences of my 'acting' in life.

As an actor in *Enigma Emmy Göring*, I was positioned in intimate relation to the audience, looking each audience member in the eye as I turned continuously on the revolving set. It was in their gaze that I became aware of my reality as an actor and pretender, not in the theatre, but in my everyday life. In "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present", Abramović is also sharing an intimate gaze with individual audience members. Biesenbach describes in the documentary the way "the audience is in quotes 'her lover' ". But rather than seducing them by acting or performing in front of them, Abramović refuses to act and perform, and it is the audience who experiences the "horror" of being an actor (seducer). In the documentary Abramović describes the area in which she performs in MoMA as being like a film set. It is constructed in this way as a large, bare, white area illuminated by four spotlights on each corner. The space is constructed in this way as somewhere where acting is to be displayed, almost scientifically like a specimen on a sterile petri dish. This magnifies the effect of Abramović's refusal to act or perform even more.

Abramović discusses the difficulty of achieving the concentration needed to do absolutely nothing for seven and a half hours every day. She describes this concentrated state as a, "stillness in the middle of the hell". Perhaps the hell she refers to is the 'acting' hell we are all living in and to which she draws attention by refusing it? Is this also the erotic hell, that Jiazhi experiences in *Lust, Caution* when she disavows her acting (pretending)? Is it Cixous's hell from where the desiring female can create? Is it Genet's hell or the *domains inférieurs*, to which Cixous refers, where the "evil" he "immerses" himself in can, as he describes it, "show us naked, and leave us distraught"? Is this logic that Genet embraced "to pray to the devil", why thousands of people queued for hours and even days for the opportunity to sit across from Abramović who is capable, as Artaud describes his theatre, of making our demons "FLOW"? Is the performer (devil) now the holy priest, capable of revealing the ethical to us? Like Ondine played the role of the Pope in *The Chelsea Girls*,

have we come now to Abramović the artist to confess our ‘acting’ sins, where she sits like Nico, a “blank slate” for the projection of our own emotions?

In this performance Abramović once again embraced her position as ‘devil’. For the first weeks of the performance she wore a red dress. The documentary showed that a poster for her exhibition that was on display in New York city had been graffitied with the word “witch” over across the image of her face.¹⁷⁸ Also, during one day of her performance someone distributed a shower of flyers over the performance area from a balcony above it (reminiscent of von Trier’s gesture in the Odéon-Théâtre in Paris) on which was written a poem calling Abramović the “whore of Babylon”. However, for the second half of the performance season she wore a white dress and referred to her task as a performer, not as the devil but rather in the martyred position of Christ, as she says in the documentary: “This is the cross I’m carrying, it’s insane. So God help me to finish this one”. Biesenbach also talks in these terms when, during the performance season, she made the decision to take away the small table that separated her from the audience member sitting opposite her: “[S]he was right, the priest doesn’t need the cross” (*Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*). In these ways Abramović drew attention to the way her position as a performer has gone from ‘devil’ to ‘prophet’ and as a woman perhaps from ‘slut’ (witch and whore) to ‘saint’.

The ethical has found a home in the aesthetic. But this home is a perilous one, something we are both seduced by and refuse. In his closing remarks in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Barish observes the desire to refuse acting and pretending as it exists today: “The antitheatrical prejudice, a consequence of the ambiguous facts of our own condition, will continue to confer on the stage, and on theatricality in everyday life, the faint savor of forbidden fruit” (477). When in the youth of our culture morality was set against aesthetics in the refusal of acting, in our time, by a kind of reversal of the location where ‘acting’ may take place, the moral question is asked anew in an aesthetic form.

¹⁷⁸ This is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s (and Plato’s) use of “witchcraft” to describe the arts of seduction. See my Introduction pp. 3.

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